



## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

*By the same author*

SHEEPDOG GLORY

CRAIG OF THE WELSH HILLS

London in the eighteen hundreds was meat hungry. Between Wales and Smithfield there grew a bustling, thriving, dangerous traffic, bringing the Welsh cattle to London markets. Roy Saunders has based his story on historical fact and the experiences of his own ancestors, giving us a full-blooded, stirring tale which provides a new and *fascinating insight into the events which* led up to the Rebecca Riots of 1839.

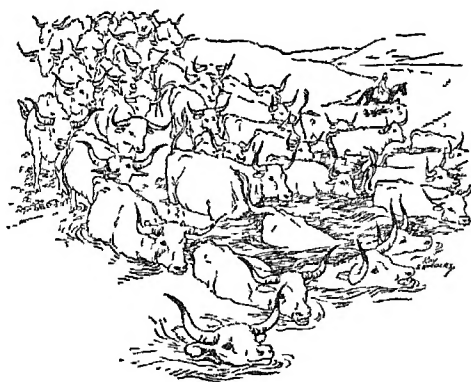


*Illustrated  
by the author*

THE

# DROVERS' HIGHWAY

ROY SAUNDERS



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## INTRODUCTION

FOR many centuries the chief produce of Wales lay in breeding cattle and sheep, and to ensure good sales, the herds were driven overland to the markets of England. The tough men who undertook this arduous and dangerous task were the drovers, who were often the only messengers, agents, and news vendors of their time. They were always the first to bring news of great battles and events of history to rural districts. Through the qualities of determination, courage, and business skill acquired in this desperate calling, many of these drovers reached outstanding positions in the banking and administration of their communities.

From Wales and Scotland, they steered their great herds by a system of routes known only to themselves across the hills and moorlands, thus avoiding many toll gates and reducing the expenses of the trek. For centuries these lone hill tracks were trodden by millions of cattle and sheep that passed on a one-way route to the east. They were the overland trade routes with England from early mediaeval times, until the coming of the railways brought the great Welsh droving epoch to an end. The hills are silent now, but the green cattle highway still runs for miles in a wide grassy corridor across the fern-clad hills of Brecon.

This story deals with one man, who after fifteen years in the Indian Army, rejoins his drover family of brothers in the boom years of the Welsh Black Cattle trade with London. Ex-Regimental Sergeant-Major Edgar Morgan is a natural leader, and shares with his brothers in the hardships and excitements of the two-hundred-mile cattle trek from Car-

marthenshire to Smithfield. On the journey home, they are recognised by highwaymen as drovers carrying the profits of their sale. Unfortunately for the highwaymen, they do not recognise their peril in falling foul of Edgar Morgan.

The profits from droving are good, but the brothers are sickened and frustrated by the toll gates that bar the way and reduce the hard-won profit. This mounting animosity against the turnpike trusts and the ever-increasing number of gates, became widespread in the early industrial era. The long-distance cattle-droving trade was threatened by the toll gate dues, and the bitter reactions of the drovers was shared by the public to such an extent that in 1839 the well-planned Rebecca Riots flared up in South Wales. The government was shocked by the fire of insurrection that swept over this peaceful and law-abiding community. One by one the toll gates were burnt and at last the government interceded and the way was cleared for the drovers to conduct their great treks to London on the freedom of the open roads as we know them today.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE HOMECOMING

IT was the night before Christmas Eve, 1837, the lights of the little port of Cardiff showed feebly above the dock gates beside the estuary of the river Taff. For Regimental Sergeant-Major Edgar Morgan, it was the gateway between the old life and the new. After a distinguished career of fifteen years in the Indian Army, he was retiring at the age of thirty-three to return to the family estate at Llandovery in Carmarthenshire. Together with many of his old comrades of the famous 3rd Dragoon Guards who crowded the ship's side, he watched the lights of his native Wales come slowly nearer.

'You're going to find life pretty dull on the land after all we've been through,' said a friend at his side.

The R.S.M., a giant of a man six foot three inches in height, and of immense physical strength, turned to look down at his comrade. An impressive black beard swathed the lower part of his face and he fixed his companion with a pair of cool grey eyes.

'Aye, but there's more to it than just farming these days,' he replied. 'My people are big cattle breeders and they've

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been walking the stock from Wales all the way to the Barnet and Smithfield butchers as often as they can get a herd together. There's good money in it if you can get back home with it, but it's dam' dangerous work, because of the robber gangs and highwaymen that spoil it for the drovers.'

At this disclosure there was a roar of laughter from the men who had been listening, as they tried to imagine a gang of English footpads getting the better of a group of cattlemen with Edgar Morgan in command.

'Look here, Edgar boy,' replied his friend. 'If you can lick your drovers into the same shape as that squad that you policed the Karima hills with two years ago, God help the highwaymen I say.'

'I've been getting letters from the old folks and my brothers,' Edgar Morgan continued. 'You see, the population of London's growing so fast that they can't get enough meat. There's big money in it, if we can get it home safely,' he repeated, 'and I'm packing in this old life and giving it a try.'

Fifteen years had passed since Edgar Morgan had left the big white-washed farm beside the Towy river at the age of eighteen, and ridden to London with his drover father and brothers. He had enlisted and been sent to the Indian Army, on which he had left his imprint, as he had also done on the fierce tribesmen of the North-West Frontier passes of the Himalayas. It was little wonder that his comrades laughed at the prospect of common highwaymen getting the better of him.

The troopship docked in the darkness and after detachments of South Walian infantry and guardsmen had disembarked, she turned to wait for the tide before crossing over to Bristol.

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The ex-scrvicemen crowded into the first public house they found, and many of them were loath to break away from that final evening of comradeship to start a new life in which they might never meet each other again. But Edgar Morgan was anxious to begin the seventy-mile walk which he intended to complete by the following evening in order to reach home on Christmas Eve.

On the outskirts of the town he cut himself a stout stick from the hedge, adjusted his big kit-bag, and strode northward along the muddy road in the darkness of the valley of the Taff. High hills closed about him on either side as he walked, and as the hours passed, the long twisting valley climbed ever higher until the open moorlands of the Brecon Beacons revealed the full glory of early morning starlight. Long experience of navigating at night among the foothills of the Himalayas, helped him on his northward route until he reached the pass and started the long descent into Breconshire.

The sun was rising as he strode into the old county town and banged on the door of the Shoulder of Mutton Inn and called for a good breakfast. However unprepared the landlord may have been to cater for wayfarers at that early hour, there was something in the voice of the giant R.S.M. that overruled any reluctance to comply with his order, and breakfast was very speedily set before him. The unaccustomed exercise of the forty-mile walk over the starlit mountain after the confinement of the long sea journey, had given him an enormous appetite, and he called for a second breakfast which was just as speedily supplied.

He tossed a gold sovereign on to the table and without waiting for his change, strode out into the narrow streets of the slowly wakening town. Then he retraced his steps for

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half a mile and struck off to the west by the old coach road that followed the rich and beautiful valley of the Usk.

The wooded hills and green fields took a gentler appearance as he strode on through the red mud of the winding road, and whatever labourers he met on the way, saluted him with a humble token of respect that his uniform, height and personality commanded.

At Trecastle he rested for an hour before a blazing log fire at the Golden Lion and quenched his thirst with a frequency that made the little band of regulars exchange glances with each other and the puzzled landlord. The last-named gentleman leaned over his counter, and longed to summon up sufficient courage to ask the stranger where he had come from. But half an hour passed before he eventually addressed himself to his impressive customer.

'Come from far you have, sir?'

The reply came back like the roar of an Indian Frontier cannon. 'Very far.'

After which an icy silence reigned once more.

The distance from India to Trecastle was very great, but the gap that existed between a Regimental Sergeant-Major of the Dragoon Guards and these humble patrons of the Golden Lion, was far greater. He would dearly have loved to cross-question them on the growth of the cattle trade with England, but he could not bring himself to break the barrier set up by his long years of command in one of the crack British regiments.

Men such as Edgar Morgan, who had given the impressionable years of their lives to promoting the growth of the British Empire in distant parts of the world, left themselves in no uncertainty about their own personal grandeur in the international scene. This was particularly the case among

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commanders of the British Army of India, and he was certainly no exception.

Unable to stand the constricting silence any longer, Edgar Morgan suddenly got to his feet and left the inn without a word. The afternoon ebbed as he descended the wooded glen of the Gwydderig. But he was deeply puzzled over his reluctance to talk with the poor country folk whose birth-right he shared. He brooded over this rehabilitation problem as the miles went by, and it became increasingly obvious to him that he would have to make an effort to relearn that happy boyish freedom which, fifteen years before, had made him so popular among the folk of his district.

Then he came to the level of a wide valley and the little town of Llandovery, three miles from his home.

He had often pondered over the way he would feel on returning after his long exile to the little township. He had no doubts about the fact that he was one of the great sons of Llandovery. Had his intended arrival been made known beforehand, a great welcome would have been prepared for him. As it was, he passed unrecognised among the little gatherings of Christmas Eve merry-makers. This was so unlike the welcome which he had imagined. He failed to see anyone he knew, though even if he had encountered an old friend of his boyhood, it is doubtful whether he would have unbent sufficiently to reveal his identity. He was puzzled, and not a little disappointed at the colourless ending to his great journey. He hurried on, anxious to rid himself of the sensation of being a nonentity, a feeling to which he was completely unaccustomed.

It was darkness as he strode along the well-remembered roadway towards Cilcwm village between the high hills with the tumbling night song of the Towy in his ears and



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the roaring of the wind in the trees. The fierce implacable watchdog of the regiment felt the emotional pull of a migrant bird returning to the home of its kind, and his pace quickened with the happy anticipation of the meeting with his parents and brothers after so long an absence. The familiar clanking of the old mill wheel came to meet him in the darkness, and as he passed it by, the urge to burst in to see old Jones the Mill and his wife, was hard to resist. A sheepdog barked at him as he passed the little cottage of Harris Glandwr, but he continued on his way, for the big farm of Glan Towy was next along the road, and that would be his journey's end. Then at last, exactly as he had left it half his life-time ago, the white-washed walls of his home emerged in the wintry darkness ahead.

Inside the great kitchen of Glan Towy, the Morgan family was resting before supper. A hard day's work in the fields was over, an enormous piece of freshly boiled ham stood on a table lit by a pair of heavy tallow candles. A third candle on the long mantelshelf illumined that part of the room. A great log fire burned in the grate casting a glow of warmth and extra light about the white-washed walls of the room which was furnished with heavy dark oak pieces. A coffer, a dower chest, a settle, a spinning wheel, an old Welsh dresser of pewter, and a cheese-press were ranged against the white-washed walls. From the black oak ceiling, hung sides of bacon, hams, smoked salmon, and a big square bread crate to keep the loaves safely from the mice.

His old mother, Rebecca Morgan, was busy preparing for the meal, and she was obviously in full command of the situation. A grey shawl was draped about her shoulders, and her coarse dark flannel skirt, lightly striped with red, was gathered into heavy voluminous folds that swept the scrubbed

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stone floor as she moved about the room. Her grey hair was parted in the centre and pulled into a tight bun, giving the impression of one who held an equally tight rein over the little empire of her five men.

In the great chimney corner, the figures of Islwyn Morgan and his four giant sons sat in silence on two high-backed dark oak skewers on either side of the blazing fire, and the strong scent of the burning oak logs, cheese, and stored apples pervaded the scene.

The four sons, Llewelyn, Rhys, Ivor and Dewi had grown to manhood under the reining influence of their mother. No talk of a daughter-in-law had ever been whispered within those walls. It was not improbable that the mother's dominant personality had contributed in no small way to the farming policy of Glan Towy. In spite of its rich fattening grounds and vast areas of good rearing hill land, the men were mainly occupied as dealers in Welsh black cattle. They had come to relish their spells of absence from the old home when gathering in cattle, and also on the long adventurous journeys when taking the cattle to London. Droving had proved more profitable than cultivating the soil. Their affairs had prospered and become the envy of less enterprising and adventurous neighbours.

'Come now boys to your supper,' commanded the mother. The five enormous men rose and clumped heavily to their places at the scrubbed deal table, and sat facing their big wooden bowls which were soon to contain a ladling of leek broth. The old man opened his Bible and reached for one of the candles, to continue reading where he had left off at the start of the previous meal. Then suddenly the back door was subjected to a thunderous bombardment of knocking that made the candles flicker.

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In that remote corner of Wales in the early part of the nineteenth century, such an assault on the privacy of a lonely farm-house could only mean one thing—a band of robbers. It was well known in the district that substantial sums of gold were kept in the old house in readiness for the purchase of cattle.

The five male members of the family went instantly to battle stations, the old man grabbed his empty pistol and the four sons picked up a stout cudgel apiece, and they crowded into the passage behind the back door. Then the knocking sounded again, and a voice boomed above the barking of the dogs, 'Open in the Queen's name.'

It was the mother who first recognised the voice and rushed past the bewildered men to unbolt the door to be swept into the arms of her giant son.

If Edgar had worried over his lack of welcome at Llandovery, he was left in no doubt about his importance at Glan Towy. He was the hero of the hour, grace was forgotten as they all set to, on the boiled ham of a never-to-be-forgotten Christmas Eve supper.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ASSEMBLING THE GREAT HERD

THE days that followed were wild and happy ones at Glan Towy farm; very little work was done, for Edgar's tales of the great world beyond the seas were a never-failing source of wonder to the family.

He would sit beside the blazing logs in the enormous fireplace and hold his audience spellbound with stories of elephants, maharajahs, temples, displays of extreme wealth and poverty, disease and starvation, the heat and the rains, the power of the army, snake charmers, and countless other tales of India.

The four brothers listened in wonderment, until with the inevitable saturation of unlikely incidents, they grew to suspect the truth of some of Edgar's tales. It was unfortunate that about this time he chose to tell them of the Hindu's attitude towards cattle which were sacred and never to be killed. It would probably have been wiser if he had withheld that story from his audience of Welsh cattle drovers. He had gone too far, and much of his earlier story-telling was treated with brotherly scepticism.

It was some time before Edgar could bring himself to do

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any work on the land. He was still a great gentleman in the eyes of his parents, nothing was too good for him. The Bible story of the Prodigal Son was carried out in every detail except the last stage. He was fêted in the hotels of Llandovery, and was a welcome visitor at all the neighbouring big houses of the gentry, particularly those that had army connections. He rode regularly to foxhounds, drank heavily, and gambled away the long winter nights, until his money was gone.

Throughout this period the brothers made frequent journeys on horseback into Cardiganshire to buy cattle. These were brought back in small droves to graze the rich valley pastures about the old homestead of Glan Towy and the wide ranges of the hill sheep-walks that overlooked the farm. The plan was to collect about four hundred head of cattle, and set off in the early spring by two separate droves of two hundred cattle, with an interval of some days between them.

As the numbers grew the pasture was eaten up at a rapidly increasing pace and it was at this time that the ever-growing herds needed extra food. Then the carefully guarded hayricks were cut into, and loads were carted out each day to the waiting cattle, both in the valley fields and beyond the mountain wall.

With the long absences of the droving members of the family on buying trips, the work of feeding the growing multitudes kept the rest of the family hard at work.

The fuss over Edgar's return slowly subsided, and with the passing of his money, he sensed the ending of his great popularity. As fresh cattle came in each week, he felt the quickening tempo of life at the farm. There was no more time to sit and listen to his tales, even if they now had any novelty. The long hauls of cartloads of hay had to be made

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to the mountain, and the ricks which had seemed too big in December, were rapidly diminishing.

It was inevitable that Edgar Morgan should one day peel off his coat, roll up his sleeves and pitch into the work of the farm. The halo of his Indian Service faded away as the call of the land took possession of him, and whenever his four brothers were away he attended to the feeding of the stock, and the bugle call of the Indian parade ground sounded ever fainter in his ears.

His brothers found the work of scouring the countryside on horseback for bunches of cattle tiring and often frustrating. If the weather was hard and some farmers were short of grass and fodder, they might be enticed to sell their store animals at a lower price. But as the spring advanced and the promise of the first flush of grass came ever nearer, the roving dealers found that farmers became more reluctant to part with the stock which they had kept throughout the winter.

In 1838 the weekly cattle markets were unknown, the system of selling livestock by public auction had not been introduced. The only public selling took place at the big hiring fairs which were held on recognised dates in the spring and autumn. At these fairs, livestock was brought into the towns, the cattle were grouped along one street, the horses along another street. The young men and girls who offered themselves for farm service would line up in another street, the men on one side and the girls on the opposite side, and prospective employers would conduct a detailed inspection for their required servant. The chosen man or woman would have to produce details of experience, and submit to an examination of the teeth, probably as a final check on their powers of digestion, as an indication of their stamina to

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face the work which lay ahead of them. The chosen servant would be given a shilling which was binding. They would then be obliged to meet the farmer at an appointed time later in the day for transport to their place of employment.

The time of the first spring sales was approaching, and the Glan Towy plan was to assemble their droves and be away for the London markets before rival drovers could assemble their herds; they would thus be first on the scene and so command the best price.

It was natural that some measure of enthusiasm for this cut-throat dealing life should be imparted to Edgar Morgan as the herds grew steadily larger about the homestead. His gambling instincts and love of adventure were stimulated by the tales brought back by his brothers from their dealing forays with the hill farmers. The life began to appeal to him, particularly the prospect of the long adventure of the journey to London and back, which loomed ever greater in their conversations as each day went by. His grand and pompous manner too was gradually absorbed by the enthusiasm for the venture on which the family gold resources were being staked. But perhaps the greatest factor in Edgar's conversion to the normal behaviour of his circle, was the Welsh language of his boyhood to which he quickly reverted. Discussions on the weather, the doings of the village, or the condition of the latest bunch of cattle, and all the other affairs of life in the valley, were conducted in Welsh, and if enunciated in the tones of the grand manner of the Indian Army the effect was ludicrous, and so Edgar's reversion to the vernacular was very speedy. He realised that there was a big job of work to do, and whether that job consisted of training and leading the 3rd Dragoon Guards, or preparing beef for

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the London market, Edgar Morgan threw in his heart and soul to see that it would be well done.

A simple incident in the daily happenings at the farm, set the tongues of the district wagging. One day a string of eight horses was observed on its way to the blacksmith to be reshod, and the news was out.

'The boys of Glan Towy must be getting ready for London.'

The big drive was always a matter of great moment in the districts where the drovers prepared for their great journeys out into the unknown. For most people in those days had rarely moved beyond their local parish boundaries, and the contemplation of such a journey deeply stirred their imagination.

Llewelyn Morgan, the eldest of the brothers, was going over his well-thumbed notebook on the evening of the day on which the horses were sent to the blacksmith. After considerable arithmetical effort he pronounced that the herd was nearly ready.

'Only two dozen more to be collected from Cwrt y Cadno, we'll fetch them over the mountain tomorrow, and the first batch can start immediately and the second lot can go off a few days after.'

There was tension in the atmosphere over supper as the lamps were lit and the five black-bearded drovers and the old parents sat round the scrubbed deal table to discuss the final details for the first party.

'I'd like Edgar to come with me tomorrow to fetch the Cwrt y Cadno bunch,' said Llewelyn. 'He's seen nothing of the buying yet, and he should see how to handle on the open hill.'

The great soldier grunted in disgust and withheld his reply



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as he silently recalled a memory of handling mule trains under heavy fire. He did not want to start a quarrel with his brother at that critical stage in the preparations for the journey. A stare from his grey eyes was enough to check any further development by Llewelyn on his shortcomings as a cattle drover.

'According to you,' said Edgar, 'there'll be so many dangers between here and London that we'll be lucky to get through with our lives, leave alone the cattle.'

Then the old father cut in. 'Don't you make too light of the robbers Edgar bach, they gets worse every summer. Me and Bicca's never happy until you boys is all safe home. The main reason why I likes to see you start off early in the year is because the gangs won't be expecting the drovers comin' back so soon with the money. But keep a sharp watch, boys bach.'

The old man finished his speech with a seriousness that the four experienced drovers recognised. But Edgar sat back and roared with laughter, until his great black beard shook with his merriment.

'Let them come, father,' he replied, 'and the more the merrier. If they come they'll have a taste of cold steel on this trip, and by God sir, when they see the Welsh black cattle boys in future they won't wait, you mark my words. I know how to treat scum when I see it.'

Something of his splendid confidence was imparted to the old couple and they rejoiced in the fact that Edgar would be with his brothers on this trip.

On the following morning after an early breakfast, Edgar and Llewelyn saddled their horses, and rode out into the cold shadow of the hills, the morning air was crisp and keen and they cantered side by side along the road to Cwrt y Cadno.

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For the first few miles the thudding hoof-beats of the horses mingled with the tumbling music of the river in its rocky gorge beside the track. There were places where the rough road followed tunnels of branches from the trees that grew on either side of the way. At other times the track climbed and clung to the open hillside giving splendid views of the greening valley with the giant hills that grew ever steeper as with each mile of splendour the valley closed about them.

This was the southern gateway to the wild and lonely sheep land of Elynedd, over which the Cardigan drovers would soon be wending their solitary way. In the face of the natural beauty of the closing hills, the two brothers cantered on in a state of happy contentment.

They followed the narrowing valley of the Towy glen until it swung sharply to the right by a spectacular gorge towards the ancient hiding-place of Twm Shon Catti, the Welsh Robin Hood of an older age.

The greening hills carried their dead red bracken of the previous year, high up to the edges of the rocky scarp that lined the mountain crests, and the fresh scent of the sodden moorlands came to meet them on the wind. For every mile of their journey, the music of the crashing rivers grew louder in their ears. Some hint of the spell of Elynedd came down through the Towy gorge and Edgar Morgan turned to his brother.

'Ever been up that way, Llewelyn?' he asked.

'That's where we get most of our sheep,' was the unimaginative reply. 'We'll be going up there for ewes when we get back from London, if we ever do get back,' he added with a twinkle.

Normally when drovers took fellow travellers on their

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first journey to London, their grim tales of the dangers of the road assumed alarming proportions. But Llewelyn knew that he would be wasting his breath if he tried to frighten his brother.

While they forded the main river and paused to give the ponies time to drink, Edgar looked into the wild glen of the Towy, and the high sheep walks that rose beyond it. Their route lay back to the left of the gorge and they climbed steadily towards the cradling hills of the Cothi river. White clouds rode by across the blue vault of the sky and their shadows went beneath them over the hills and valleys. From the climbing track they watched the ever-widening panoply of mountain grandeur spreading out below them.

On the other side they heard the falling of the head-waters of the Cothi crashing along a deep ravine of oak woods. From all directions the roar of hidden rivers thundered through the trees.

Then they followed a long descent to the floor of the valley, where all the foaming rivers of the mountain were merged into the gentle winding Cothi. Three miles further on, they came to Cwrt y Cadno and the end of the first half of their journey.

As they looked up at the little farm on the hillside, Llewelyn explained to his brother, 'I could have bought his cattle two months ago but he wanted too much for them. He still hasn't sold them I can see. He's got to pay his rent next week and I think he's short of money so we'll help him out. Leave all the talking to me.'

This apparent philanthropy on the part of Llewelyn was not as great as it appeared. It was one of the dealers' tricks to delay the purchase of some farm stock until almost the eve of the landlord's visit to collect his rent. Then the dangling

of a bag of gold was guaranteed to weaken the poor tenants' resistance to the dealer's offer and he could then usually buy at his own price.

The interview with Roberts Cwrt y Cadno, followed the time-honoured pattern. The dealer pretended to be passing by, and a long good-natured chat ensued on the weather, the prospects for the spring, the hunting, the family health, in fact anything except the sale of the cattle. Roberts knew what Llewelyn Morgan wanted, and Morgan knew that Roberts wanted to sell his cattle. But each felt that it would weaken his case if he opened the subject that was uppermost in his mind. Several times Llewelyn made a pretence of turning his pony's head as though about to continue his journey, but Roberts kept him talking until it became obvious to the riders that they had an eager seller, and Llewelyn knew that he could afford to show his hand.

'I see you've still got the cattle, Roberts,' he mumbled, with an indifferent wave of the hand.

'Oh yes, indeed, I think I'll run them on over the summer,' he replied. 'Plenty of grass coming soon.'

The dealer's poker face showed not the slightest concern in how long they were to be kept, and he turned his horse to urge it on, and with a gesture of farewell began to move away. His brother, who was a past master at every wangle in the British Army gave a nervous but affected cough of dismay until he noticed that Roberts had made a quick move to walk beside his brother, and he began to appreciate something of his guile.

'Of course if you could do with them I'd let them go to you for seven apiece,' said the farmer with the first trace of eagerness creeping into his voice.

But the rider continued his walking pace and silently

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raised his hand in mock horror at the prospect of such a figure.

'Six pounds apiece then,' said Roberts in desperation.

Llewelyn Morgan reined in his horse and looked down at his victim with a look of withering condescension.

'Look here, Roberts bach, I'll tell you what I'll do,' he said, jingling some coins in his pocket, 'I'll give you four pounds apiece for them and take them off your hands for you,' and he stretched out his open palm for Roberts to smack in the time-honoured method of clinching a deal.

This time it was Roberts' turn to look offended as he stopped in his tracks, stupefied beyond belief that anyone could offer so little. He was about to express his disgust when the dealer turned to go once more, but Roberts was at his side again with a reluctant offer to let him have them for five apiece.

By this time they had ascended the hillside to where the cattle were grazing. The twenty-five black bullocks had spent a lean winter on the high hills, and the dealer knew, that faced with their poor condition, he could argue more strongly.

Roberts was about to point out the stronger beasts when the dealer turned to his brother and said, 'Well, Edgar, you were a witness that when I offered four apiece, it was before I saw them, and now I've seen the runts I'm afraid they're not worth even that. Come on, we're only wasting our time here.'

But Roberts was not prepared to let them go, and now it was his turn to offer the outstretched palm.

'Go on Mr Llewelyn, I'll take four pounds ten for them.'

'Not bloody likely,' said the dealer. 'I'll be back to see them in the autumn.' Then he delivered a lengthy sermon

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on the miseries, hardships, dangers and difficulties of the long journey to London and back, with the attendant depreciation of the animals on the way, the personal expense of the men, the toll-gates to be passed through, the payment for grazing each night, and the cost of shoeing the cattle. It was delivered with such resounding conviction that by the time he had finished, it seemed a mystery to the stick-at-home John Roberts that anyone would want to take all the trouble.

He was weakening visibly, and the dealer listened to a long-winded account of the hard times that farmers were passing through. Llewelyn had given his drover hardship speech, and had listened to such talk so many times before, that he knew the psychological moment to cut in with a magnanimous gesture to help him out and take them off his hands for four pounds apiece.

The open hand was extended again, the moment had been cleverly timed, and the gesture of friendship and cordiality that accompanied it was so hypnotic, that the simple farmer was swept away, and he brought his horny palm down on the dealer's hand with such a smack that the pony sprung aside.

Then Llewelyn Morgan dismounted, drew a purse from his pocket, and counted out a hundred gold sovereigns which the farmer pocketed quickly. The twenty-five cattle were then rounded up and driven eastwards across the hills to the rich sheltered valley of the Towy. For Llewelyn Morgan the two droves were complete, and he was almost ready for the great trek.

On the following morning, preparations were made to brand each beast on both sides with a letter M in white paint. Everyone in the district, at this stage, knew of the happenings at Glan Towy and crowds came to lend a hand.

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A number of riders rode along the boundary wall of Glan Towy hill and the cattle were shepherded in a great black lowing herd. The noise of the shouting men, the barking dogs, and the ever-growing roar of the bellowing cattle reached far across the hills on the cold morning air, and down at the farm they knew that the herd was approaching.

Then the giant avalanche of Welsh black cattle started coming down the hill to pour into the paddock behind the farm, straying beasts were rounded up until every animal was gathered into the big yard behind the house. Then a narrow walled exit, wide enough to permit one beast at a time to return to the field, was manned by the two markers, one on either side, with a bucket of white paint and a branding iron each. Edgar was put in charge of the count with strict orders to shout as the two hundredth beast went through. Llewelyn stood beside him to check the condition of each one and judge whether it would be fit to stand up to the journey.

When all was ready and the markers were poised with their paint-charged branding irons, the gate was opened and the first beast entered the narrow space to be stamped with a white M on both sides of its black flanks. The man who had blocked the field entrance jumped aside, and the animal was released. Edgar duly recorded the fact with a stroke in his notebook. As the second beast pushed into the passage to receive its owner's brand, its flight to freedom was again noted by the conscientious Edgar. After the tenth mark, he drew a line to facilitate the final count when nearing the two hundredth beast.

The work proceeded with the cool unhurried efficiency of most things at Glan Towy. No frightening or ill treatment was permitted, as any stampeding of the great herd in

### ASSEMBLING THE GREAT HERD

such a small space would result in injury and some non-starters on the big trek. The job went steadily on until Edgar's announcement that the two hundredth beast was passing through, brought the proceedings to a halt for lunch.

Three sheep had been killed for the occasion, barrels of beer had been brought from Llandovery, and helpers and visitors alike crowded into the kitchen, for this was the first of several occasions in the year when there would be open house at Glan Towy. But before pitching in, the vicar of Cilcwm called for silence. Then followed a simple grace and a request for divine protection for the men who would be leaving home on the following day to face the dangers and hardships of their long journey, to 'relieve the hunger of the starving multitudes of London.'

At that part of his address he was obliged to raise his voice to be heard above a sudden concerted chorus of bellowing from many of the two hundred bullocks and heifers still standing in the confines of the yard, as though they understood the grim significance of the vicar's words for them. As soon as he had finished, the hungry helpers set to work on the boiled mutton, bread and beer until everything had disappeared. During the meal, the two hundred marked animals were transferred to an adjoining field to be kept apart from the other half of the herd so that they would be ready to start the following morning. Then action stations were manned once more and the careful job of branding and tallying was resumed until the last beast was marked, making a grand total of four hundred and one.

The day at Glan Towy was not over at that stage; for many it was only the beginning. One of the barns had been cleared, barrels of beer were mounted in positions, and the thirsty drovers quaffed until many of them were incapable



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of drinking more. A choir from Llandovery arrived, and the well-loved songs of old Wales rang out again and again far into the night. The noisiest roysterer of them all was the one-time Regimental Sergeant-Major of the Indian Dragoon Guards. The long freedom of his life on the farm and the happy spirit of the projected adventure, was awakening a new side to his character. The rigorous discipline of his long army training was slowly but surely being sublimated into that of a swashbuckling adventurer, that boded ill for any prospective highwayman who should cross his path on the road to London.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE START OF THE BIG TREK

ON the following morning there was an unusual bustle in Glan Towy kitchen where the five brothers prepared for the start of the first drove. It had been agreed that they would all ride together for the first part of the day, and two would return to take the second drove some days later.

Heavy boots and well-oiled leather leggings were strapped in position. Each man wore a thick tweed suit of coarse Brethyn Cartref made from the wool of their own sheep in the mill at Cilcwm. As they breakfasted on oatmeal porridge and fried gammon and eggs, a great deal of shouting came from the yard where neighbours assembled to share in the start of the great adventure. By the time the brothers came out in their heavy overcoats, a dozen horsemen greeted them. They mounted their ponies and with a wave to the old couple in the doorway they all moved off to the field where the bullocks were grazing. They rounded them up, and started off along the hill-road over Cilcwm mountain, while the horsemen followed. The pace of the cattle slowed as the climb steepened and the riders allowed them to set the pace. They knew from experience that with a long day

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before them, the speed of the drive would be determined by the pace of the first few miles, an easy start always resulted in a better day's drive.

The main drove road from Lampeter in Cardiganshire came down to Cilcwm village where it forded the Towy and went on over the mountain, it was thus convenient for the Glan Towy drovers to make an easy start. As they climbed at last beyond the level of the highest fields, the open hill



received them, and the climbing eased. The cattle had strung out into a long straggling black line that stretched eastward towards a dull red, ominous-looking dawn. As the horsemen topped the hill and saw the red light in the sky, they knew that the weather prospects for the day were bad.

Llewelyn reined in his horse and called a halt while they discussed the prospects of the weather. The twenty horsemen grouped in a huddle made a splendid picture in the lurid red of that fearsome dawn. A cold north-easter tore at the

## THE START OF THE BIG TREK

horses' manes and tails and the babble of discussion rose above the noise of the March wind.

'The point is this,' shouted Llewelyn, 'it looks like heavy snow, and if we get spring snow today on the Eppynt it'll melt by tomorrow and the River Wye will be in flood, and we'll have to pay Twm Bach to ferry the cattle over on his damned raft instead of fording 'em over for nothing.'

The personal hardships of riding out the blizzard did not concern these men of the mountains. It was not from any fear of inconvenience that they discussed the weather, but only for its effect upon the state of the River Wye which would affect the expenses of the expedition. In order to make it worth while, as many tolls as possible had to be avoided.

'We've had a fortnight's dry weather,' he continued, raising his voice above the wind. 'The Wye's gone down and we'd have the cattle over easy, if it snows today we'll have to pay that bloody Twm Bach tomorrow and it goes against the grain, I can tell you.'

His listeners could make little comment, for the logic of his words was indisputable. Only one man dared to raise an opposing point of view.

'Pity to turn back Llew, bad luck,' interposed Edgar. 'I don't like the idea of turning back, the weather may break and if the Wye rises too high the ferryman may not be able to get us over for a week and we'll lose the Easter market altogether.'

To Llewelyn this represented a greater disaster than having to pay for the ferrying.

'All right, then,' he shouted, 'go ahead boys bach,' and they turned and broke into a gallop to catch up the herd which had strung out along the ancient grassy road. Edgar

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

had often resented the authority of his elder brother, and was satisfied that his point of view had swayed the issue.

For half a mile the way lay over the level mountain before it started to fall into the valley of Cynhordy. The red sunrise soon ceased to trouble them as all traces of it were blotted out behind a bank of dark snow clouds that rose in weird terraces across the eastern sky. Beyond the valley, the high moorlands of the Eppynt looked wild and lonely in the light of the gathering storm; some of the riders began to feel a strange sense of foreboding and even looked forward to returning home as soon as someone had the courage to suggest the idea.

When the drove started moving down the hill the two servant men galloped ahead to check the scamper of the leading bullocks which they knew would take place on a long downgrade. At that point the riders who had accompanied the cavalcade, decided to turn back, and farewells were taken. Then Edgar, Rhys and Ivor rode on alone into the valley on the tail of the herd. Edgar felt relieved at the absence of his older brother; now he was in command, and nothing on the face of the earth would stop his advance.

They forded the little river of the Brân without difficulty and began the long ascent towards the Eppynt mountain plateau. The track led them along the slopes of Cefn Llwydlo hill near the place where the railway line from Shrewsbury to Swansea now emerges from the Sugar Loaf tunnel.

The two servant men rode ahead, and the cattle followed them slowly upwards. The wind grew ever louder as they climbed and clouds darkened the sky. The three brothers brought up the rear and watched the splendid spectacle of the two hundred big black oxen toiling slowly up the mountainside into the teeth of the wind and the gathering

storm. To Edgar it was a more moving sight than anything that he had ever witnessed in all his travels, and his heart warmed to the challenge ahead. Even his two brothers who were so accustomed to such sights, responded to his continual expressions of enthusiasm. At last they passed the lonely church of Llandulas and eventually reached the level of the long plateau of the Eppynt and the full force of the gale. Far ahead of them, the wide green turf of the cattle road was clearly visible between the dead brown fern of the previous year, as it followed the highest parts of the land. But in the distance they could see the grey blur of the approaching storm gradually blotting out their track. Then rain began to fall, and it quickly turned to sleet and stinging hail, the force of the wind increased, it began to snow, and the riders had to bow their heads low and urge their horses into the teeth of the storm. The greater part of the herd was lost to view in front of them, and they realised the desperate situation that might arise if the cattle lay down in the bracken to sleep out the storm. The nearest human habitation was five miles away along the track, the Drovers' Arms, where they had planned to pass the night. No landmarks lay along the moor to guide them to the place of refuge, only the sheep track between the fern, and already their world was turning white about them. Ivor and Rhys decided to gallop on ahead leaving Edgar to force the pace at the rear. They galloped on either side of the line of cattle shouting and harrying as they went, in an effort to stir the snow-laden animals into a run. When they reached the head of the line the two men were frantically driving the leaders on into the welter of snow along the track, now only faintly visible in places between the fern.

'Keep them going, boys,' shouted Ivor above the storm,

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

'don't let them stop or lie down or we'll never get them started again.'

The two servant men fully realised the need to keep the cattle moving into the headwind. The task of keeping the leaders going and seeing that they were on the track, was an exhausting job for the men and horses as the wind and snow increased its violence and visibility decreased. The two brothers trotted back shouting and driving groups that were slowing down before the blizzard, until the roaring and blasting voice of the ex-R.S.M. reached them over the gale as he flayed the tail-end bullocks to keep them with the rest.

For over an hour they kept it up, urging on the laggard groups and galloping along the line to keep the mass together. The blizzard was so thick, that at times it was impossible to see for more than fifty yards. The herding instinct which kept such animals together under normal conditions, was slowly breaking down, and individual groups of cattle which had been bought in as a part-herd, were beginning to lose interest in the main herd which they had known only for a short time. In face of the storm and the ceaseless bullying from the men, they became stupid and fractious. Edgar stuck to his post in the rear and dealt with the slowest cattle; his was the hardest job of all, and thanks to his mighty voice and wonderful horsemanship he managed to keep the tail-end in touch with the main body of the herd.

All signs of the track had long since disappeared and their only guide was the wind; they assumed that by heading into it, sooner or later they would sight the lonely Drovers' Arms. If the wind changed, they would be lost.

With the ever-deepening snow the pace of the leading beasts slowed down to a labouring struggle, and the steaming horses also began to flag and their response grew slower.

## THE START OF THE BIG TREK

Then with dramatic suddenness, three horsemen came plunging through the snow, and Rhys Morgan who was leading, heard the well-known voice of Jeremiah Jones, landlord of the Drovers' Arms shouting:

'Who is there, Duw Mawr, drovers it is, on a day like this?'

Then having no reply from the leading drover and quite failing to recognise him, he came cautiously forward, reluctant to admit his inability to recognise any leader of such a herd. He knew Rhys Morgan well, but such was the thickness that covered him, that he had to peer closely into his face before recognition dawned with a roar of laughter. Greetings were soon exchanged and the three fresh riders took up the task of urging the herd forward, and fifteen minutes later, the gaunt homestead on the moor loomed up through the tail of the storm. The landlord had heard the distant noise of the approaching cavalcade, and with the help of two passing travellers had set out in the direction of the noise, to meet the drove. The whole herd was guided into the field which was kept for their reception beside the house, the tired horses were stabled and given a good rub down. Then, as the big men entered the doorway of the inn, the tail-end of the wild spring storm was passing through the shelter belt of trees that ringed the house. The lamps were lit, fresh logs were piled on the giant blaze, and the travellers sat before it in a cloud of steam that rose from their sodden clothes. Tankards of hot grog were brought in and they drank and talked of the hard adventure on the moor.

*With their feet to the logs,  
On the piled up dogs,  
In the snug old chimney corner.*



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Now that the threatening incident had ended well, Edgar expanded happily and talked and joked with a flowing freedom of expression.

After supper, the heat of the room induced a sleepiness in the men who had battled so hard against the mountain wind, and one by one they clumped up the old oak stairs to a well-earned rest.

They were awakened all too soon by the ringing music of mating curlews that chased each other in courtship flight around the inn. Edgar rose and went to the window to look out. The thaw had followed quickly on the heels of the freak spring storm, the snow-laden roof was dripping in a noisy cascade of water, and the sodden snowfields were wreathed in mist. He remembered his brother's words about the River Wye which would be rising rapidly throughout the day. There was no time to lose, and he shook his sleeping companions.

'Come on,' he bawled, 'we've got to get down to the Wye before it's too late, by tonight it'll be too heavy for that raft and we may be stranded for days before we can get across.'

Rhys and Ivor were soon dressed, and after a quick breakfast they settled up with Jones the landlord. The servant men who had slept in the stable straw near the warmth of the horses, soon had them saddled and fed. Then with the help of the landlord, the herd was rounded up and started on its journey towards the village of Erwood in the valley of the Wye.

Edgar and Jones were riding side by side, when the subject of the Inn was brought up. They turned round for a last glimpse of it as it faded away in the mist behind them.

'Dam' lonely place to live in, Jones, how do you manage it?' said Edgar.

'Lonely indeed,' replied the landlord, 'you should be here

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a bit later in the season, mister, then you'd see something. Do you know that all the livestock from Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and most of Cardigaushire comes past my place to go to England, and most of them stops with me before going down to ford the Wye at Erwood. All from Pembroke and Carmarthen and Lampeter comes up the way you come yesterday and everything from Tregaron comes through that gap in the Abergwessin hills up there to the north,' and he pointed to the wild pass in the mountains that towered above the morning mist twelve miles away. 'D'you see the point mister? My house is where they all makes for, because of the Wye crossing and dodging the toll-gates. Then once they are over the river they can be shod at Painscastle up there in the Radnor hills,' and he pointed ahead to where the snow-clad highlands of the next county rose above the intervening sea of mist. 'Then they are right for Hereford and the roads of England.'

Edgar was gradually beginning to appreciate something of the romantic side of this complicated route system and how the accident of geography affected the great industry by which markets were made available to Welsh farmers through the hard work and enterprise of the drovers. An academic interest began to develop within him.

'Have you any idea how many cattle pass your place in one season?' he asked.

'Yes, indeed I have,' he replied, 'and if I was to tell you you'd only laugh, but last year I kept a careful check on the stock that passed my place, and if I was to tell you it was over thirty thousand bullocks would you be surprised, mister?'

The black-bearded giant looked down at the little landlord beside him with a searching look that men have who

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are accustomed to command others, such men can usually tell through a blend of instinct and experience when they are being told the truth. Edgar Morgan believed the little man and was astounded.

'And that's only cattle mind you,' went on the landlord. 'What about the sheep, probably double that number, I've never counted 'em, and the pigs from Cardiganshire that goes over to Glamorgan and across the sea to Bristol, and the geese flocks with their feet covered with tar and sand to save them from wearing on the roads. Yes, they all come by Drovers' Arms, it's the cross roads you see between the north and south, and West Wales and London; I can tell you, mister, it's not lonely.'

He ended his speech with such an air of finality that his listener accepted his statements and thanked him for his information. This droving business was obviously much bigger than he had ever imagined. His satisfaction mounted as he realised his good fortune, after giving up army life, to find himself playing a part in such a great enterprise.

They were descending the little valley of Cwm Owen, the herd had lengthened out and the first part of it was already climbing the snow-clad slope on the other side. The sun came out above the clouds into a clear blue sky, and the morning air was vibrant with the freshness of an Alpine spring that the presence of the fading snow helped to accentuate. The cavalcade of black cattle against the white snow made a striking picture as they plodded on, their breath condensing into wisps of steam beside them.

From Cwm Owen, where the drove road crossed the main highway from Brecon to Builth, the route lay over a steadily rising plateau, and near the highest point, a mountain lake, the Black Pool, came into view behind a fold in the

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moor. A skein of wild ducks rose from its surface as the leading horseman appeared on the skyline. Then the birds took up formation, made an uneasy circle of the mere and climbed away into the sky towards the south.

Gradually the sloping trackway approached the source of the Clettwr river, grouse were calling from the sodden heather, and the notes of a storm-cock came ringing up from one of the deep valleys before them. The going became ever easier the further they descended, for the snow had already melted in the hollows of the glen.

A zigzag roadway finally led them down to the little hamlet of Gwenddwr. On the steep fields on the other side of the glen, several hundred mountain sheep were grazing the fields which the shepherds had kept virgin in readiness for the critical lambing period at a later date in the spring. But with the threatened snowstorm of the previous day, the men and dogs had swept the moorlands clear of sheep and folded them in safety on the nursery fields beside the singing river to find safety from dreaded snowdrifts. Now, in the warm sunlight and the rapid thaw, the shepherds were already preparing to drive them back again.

The herd marched on beside the babble of the river, and snatches of bird song accompanied them as they wound in a black ribbon along the narrow twisting valley.

At last the deep rift of the Wye gorge came into sight below them, and the snarl of the now swollen river came to greet them, as it swept between its tree-lined banks. On the other side of the gorge the snowy highlands of Radnorshire rose into the blue morning sky with farmlands nestling in sheltered terraces on the climbing hills. The roaring of the barrier of the flooded Wye grew ever louder as the drovers descended towards the little village of Erwood.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FERRYING THE HERD

THE wooded ravine of the Wye, where the narrow fields bordered the river, made a fine sight as seen from Eppynt road, but the drovers were not inclined to appreciate the beauty of the scene. With rapidly melting snow pouring into the river all the way to its source on the slopes of Plynlimmon mountain forty miles away, they were faced with a big decision.

'Keep them going, boys,' came a shout from Ivor who was half-way along the herd. 'If we can't get across soon, the river will be too high, and we'll be stranded for days. Keep 'em going.' And he implemented his orders with suitable shouts and threats to urge the animals on. Everyone else did the same until the valley rang with their noise. As they passed through the little hamlet of Erwood, barking dogs came out to speed them on their way, and when the noise of the dogs had ceased, they heard the ominous sound of the rising river.

As they started on the final slope, the cattle broke into a jog-trot and the drovers gave them their head. The previous spell of dry weather in March had suited their purpose as

#### FERRYING THE HERD

the river would have been low enough to walk the cattle over at the shallow ford, but now they were faced with the dangers, expense, and delay of ferrying the cattle over to the Radnorshire side, and the sooner they could start the better.

Down at the ford, the little ferryman, Twm Bach, was pottering in his workshop when he suddenly heard the far-away noise of cattle approaching along the drove road from the Eppynt. He knew immediately that the first herd of the year was on its way to London. Rushing into his cottage he shouted the good news to his wife.

'I'll bet it's the Morgans' boys from Cilcwm again this year,' he yelled as he went off to his ferry to see that everything was ready. He was chortling happily to himself as he checked the working of the winch and raft that floated in a backwater of the turbulent river.

'They won't get across without me this year,' he mumbled to himself as the bellowing of the cattle grew ever louder as they descended the slope of the wooded gorge and came towards the ferry.

Suddenly a black-bearded rider galloped down to the water's edge. He jumped off his horse to study the flooded river. Then he saw the ferryman standing by his raft, and there was no need to ask what the chances were of fording the cattle: it was obviously impossible and the twinkle in the little ferryman's eyes confirmed it.

'Good morning, Twm Bach,' Morgan shouted above the noise of the river. 'Is the ferry working?'

'Yes, of course it is Mr Morgan, how many have you brought?'

'Two hundred, same as usual,' he replied.

'Right ho, then, bring them up close. I'll get them over for you.'

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By this time the bellowing herd was approaching the landing-stage where most of the cattle were diverted into a little paddock which had been made for the purpose. The approach slope to the water had two walls which converged to the landing-stage where the log raft floated. Part of the herd was driven on to the slope between the walls, and the two leading beasts were pushed on to the raft by the pressure of the herd behind them. A rope from the raft was connected to a winch manned by two men. A second rope from the raft was suspended over the river round a pulley on the opposite bank and back to another winch near the first one. The two winches were worked alternately to pull the raft on its journey to and fro across the Wyc. The winch handles were turned and the two frightened cattle on the raft were floated over. As soon as the raft touched the opposite bank, they leapt ashore into a fenced enclosure beneath the pulley, and the men on the other winch wound the unloaded raft back to its original position. Then the waiting cattle on the ramp were stirred up again and the two beasts nearest to the raft were forced on to it. At a shout from Twm Bach the men on the winch handles went into action again and the second pair were slowly ferried across to join the other two.

When most of the cattle on the slope had been ferried over, a fresh lot from the paddock was driven to join them and supply the pressure needed to force the forward cattle on to the raft. The bellowing of the bullocks and shouting of the men attracted everyone from the nearby village of Erwood, and there was no shortage of helpers to make the beasts turn on the pressure when it was needed. Edgar Morgan sent a boy to the village for two large buckets of beer to quench the thirsts of all. Relays of willing helpers took turns at the

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winch. Gradually the herd on the Brecon side grew smaller and the herd on the Radnor side grew larger, and the beautiful wooded gorge of the Wye resounded throughout the day with the bellowing of the black steers.

It was late in the afternoon when they were all safely across. Edgar Morgan paid the ferryman, then horses and men were ferried over amidst roars of laughter from the women and good-humoured banter from the men. For the folk of the village it had been a red letter day of great excitement. By the time the last of the drovers had reached the other side, the cattle had been released and were moving steadily up the slope of the Radnor hills.

'Come on boys, get a move on,' shouted Ivor. 'We must try and get to Painscastle before dark if we can. I'll lead for a bit,' and he urged his horse forward until, nearing the front of the herd, he cut off three steers and harried them forward at a trot. The leading beasts thus left behind broke into a run to catch up the three ahead, and speed was gradually picked up by the entire herd and the following horsemen.

But the gradient began to tell and they slowed down. The ancient drove road became more open as they moved ever higher, and the deep valley of the Wye fell further away below and behind them, until the high wide moorlands claimed them again. Brown fern stood clear of the snow on either side, the centuries old cattle track pointed to the east, and the herd moved slowly forward.

Gradually the westering sun went down behind them, the shadows deepened and night crept over the land.

By the time they descended to the village it was dark, but news of their approach had already reached the hamlet through the lowing of the cattle as they followed the hill crest, and a great welcome awaited them. The gate to the



## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

ha'penny field had been opened and the villagers lined up to guide the cattle into their sanctuary for the night, while the five men repaired to the tavern of the Black Ox for refreshment.

The advent of the first drove of the season had the same effect upon the people of Painscastle as it had had upon the Erwood folk. Its arrival was the long awaited signal that winter was over and from now on, the animal traffic would relieve the monotony of early nineteenth-century life in the village. Everyone was excited and the extent of the fuss caused Edgar Morgan no little embarrassment. His great size and military bearing attracted special attention for such a man had never been seen in that lonely mountain village.

At the bar of the Black Ox, Edgar, Rhys, Ivor and their two servant men were the toast of Painscastle, and they responded in kind with the county news of Carmarthen and Brecon, until Edgar started one of his tales of India. Then quite suddenly the hubbub trailed away and glasses remained untouched until the tale was finished. His audience was so enraptured, that its stimulation inspired him to talk on and on, logs were piled on the fire and sighing exclamations of wonder broke from the listeners like wind-blown zephyrs in a forest of trees. Glasses were emptied and refilled many times until at last the customers went staggering away into the darkness, to relate garbled and exaggerated versions of the Indian rope trick, cobras, snake charmers, mongooses, elephants, cavalry charges, and the mighty grandeur of the Himalayan mountains. The lore of India was destined to linger for a long time in the conversations of the Painscastle folk.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SHOEING THE HERD

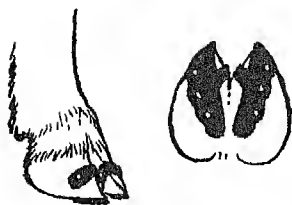
THE next morning was unofficially declared a holiday in the village, for the cattle had to be shod with iron for the long journey on the hard roads of England. So far they had only travelled on the grass tracks of the mountain, thus avoiding the toll-gates at Brecon and Hay. Some of the English toll-gates would be unavoidable, but a cleverly worked out system of routes enabled the drovers to by-pass many of them.

Cattle shoeing was skilled work, and the smiths of Painscastle were specialists in the craft. The winter was given up to preparing the iron protectors for nailing to the cloven hoofs, two were needed for each foot. Most of the stock that passed through Painscastle were shod there.

The three brothers were interrupted in the middle of breakfast by a visit from George the Gof, and the sturdy, capable-looking specimen of a blacksmith was shown into the parlour.

'How many have you brought this year, Mr Morgans?' he began, although he had already made an accurate count of the occupants of ha'penny field that morning before the

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drovers were astir. By ancient custom the smith knew that the droves of Morgans Glan Towy were always shod at Painscastle.

'We've got two hundred, George, how long will it take you this year?'

The blacksmith knew precisely how long it would take him, but it was part of his native reticence to treat the question of time taken for the job with the grave consideration warranted by the immensity of the task. The men at the table watched the wily blacksmith as he thought.

'There be four of us on the job this year,' he began, 'and with help we may be able to get through perhaps by tomorrow night.'

Edgar Morgan had only witnessed the shoeing of driven cattle on one occasion when in his impressionable boyhood he had ridden to London to join the army. His racy stories of life with the drovers had been as much enjoyed in the army as his army tales were enjoyed by the drovers. He was looking forward to watching the operation with almost as much relish as his first encounter with highwaymen.

'Well, let's get started, then,' said Ivor, and with that he finished his meal and got up, and the others followed him out into the cold spring sunlight. Outside a crowd of villagers were waiting beside two small handcarts loaded with sacks of cattle shoes. The strange cavalcade then moved off along the muddy village street, the tall figures of the bearded drovers in their travelling clothes, the four sturdy blacksmiths with the loaded handcarts, a motley collection of curious men and women, and all the children of the district.

Ha'penny field was a rough paddock some two acres in

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size which was owned by a local farmer. So great was the cattle traffic through the village of Painscastle during the summer, that this field was reserved for the exclusive use of droves during their stay. The customary tack rent was a halfpenny per beast for each night spent in the field. This meant a substantial sum of money earned by the end of the autumn. The field was always closely bitten down by the morning but through heavy manurings and short rests from grazing, it recovered quickly and was always green by the time the next drove arrived. Facilities for catching and shoeing were provided in a well-built wooden enclosure in one corner of the field, and here the blacksmiths in their leather aprons prepared for the long day's toil.

About a dozen beasts were herded into the enclosure, which still left room for the four men to work. Then one of the cattle was seized by the horns and a rope put round its neck, it was drawn away from its fellows and tethered to a stout post. A rope was then passed round the outside of its four legs and one end was inserted in a noose at the other end. Then the big noose thus formed about the legs was tightened; this tended to pull them together. At that stage the beast was swiftly untied from the post and given a whack on the back which made it try to return to the herd. Because of the interference in its leg stability, it fell over on to its side when its feet were quickly tied in pairs, and two short Y-shaped posts inserted between the two pairs of tied legs, and the big animal was as helpless as a turtle on its back. One blacksmith trimmed the hooves and the other deftly nailed on the shoes. Then the knots were untied, and it was allowed to regain the company of its fellows, shod and ready for the great trek. Volunteers came forward to help with the catching, the struggle to tie the beasts, pass the noose

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round the legs and overbalance them on to their sides, and the four blacksmiths did the rest. When the twelve in the pen were ready for the road, they were released through a second gate into an adjoining field to be kept away from the unshod herd. Relays of catchers worked all day to help the blacksmiths until a hundred beasts had passed through the shoeing pen and half the drove was finished as night came down, and silence settled over Ha'penny field.

On the following day, the second half of the drove was shod, and by the evening, they too were ready to continue the trek.

'How much do I owe you, George?' were the musical words that greeted the senior blacksmith's ears as he untied the last bullock. He straightened his back, carefully removed his apron, wiped the sweat from his brow and looked at Ivor Morgan. At tenpence a head it came to £8 6s. od. and some odd pence.

'Give me £8 6s. od.,' replied George magnanimously. Ivor paid him in gold and silver from a leather purse and followed his brothers in the direction of the Black Ox Inn from where a strong smell of fried ham and eggs came to greet him on the evening breeze. They were soon seated at supper which was followed by a liberal flow of home brewed beer.

But the Painscastle folk had not yet finished with their visitors. With typical Welsh hospitality, a Noson Lawen, or merry night of song (one of the traditional features of old Wales), had been prepared in their honour and the talented locals on the harp and the violin had volunteered to perform. Singers, reciters and tale-tellers assembled in the big room of the Black Ox and the night was given up to spontaneous contributions. Impromptu verses were sung in the traditional

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penillion to harp accompaniment on the subject of big black beards, and never failed to bring roars of applause. Jokes and tales about drovers and highwaymen also claimed top ranking in entertainment value. There were serious and semi-serious solos, and some songs that were so funny that neither the performer or the audience could restrain their mirth to reach the end, and of course there was community singing, the best-loved entertainment in all the land of Wales, when for some strange reason a lump comes into the throat of singer and listener alike. Edgar Morgan stood roaring his heart out, with a quart pewter tankard in his hand, until quite suddenly, in spite of his years of exile, he felt a momentary hiraeth for all the fifteen years which he had spent away from his beloved Wales. He stopped singing while the fleeting moment of emotion passed over him, then he joined in again, hoping that no one had noticed his lapse. In spite of all his bombast, he was a true son of the land, and was enjoying every moment of this new experience.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FIRST TOLL-GATE ON THE ENGLISH BORDER

THERE were many hangovers in Painscastle when the revellers woke on the following morning. Some had gone to sleep on the Black Ox taproom floor, and were bundled out into the early morning before cleaning-up operations began. The five drovers were given a hasty breakfast, the horses were saddled, and the drove restarted. They retraced their steps to the hilltop from which they had descended three nights previously, and then turned the herd on to the ridge track and continued eastward. Most of the snow had vanished except for thin lines of white that marked the deepest drifts in the lee of mountain walls. The wide green road lay ahead of them along the length of Clyro Hill pointing towards England. To their left the high lands of Radnorshire rolled northward, and to their right, the distant wall of the great Black Mountains of Monmouthshire made a wonderful spectacle, blue-white with snow in the morning sunlight. Below and before them, the winding course of the River Wye led the eye over the ever-widening Hereford plain with its patchwork of fields and woodlands. This was the drovers' gateway to England, the point where

young men on their first drove saw England for the first time.

The plan for the day was to do no more than ten miles, to reach the toll-gate at Willersley near the Hereford border. The urgency of the first two days was over, and much of the morning on the open hill was given up to grazing time.

These Welsh drovers of old were totally unlike the modern so-called drovers of today's cattle markets who yell and roar at cattle and whack them in and out of the selling rings in the hope of beer money. Owner drovers, such as the sons of Glan Towy, invested most if not all their money on each herd they took to London. The better condition that they were in, the greater would be the selling price on presenting their stock for sale in the markets of Barnet and Smithfield. Their profit depended on the slowness of the pace, and the amount of feeding and rest which the cattle had on the way. Prolonged patience was thus one of a drover's greatest assets, a patience invoked by economic necessity.

As the miles went slowly by along the hilltop overlooking the plain, the quiet rhythmic movements of the animals induced a tranquil sense of peace in the minds of the men who steered them. Edgar's earlier intolerance at the slow pace, gradually subsided as he grew to realise the all-important need for keeping the animals in good shape. He also realised that his close-fisted brothers with their poor command of English would be faced with difficulty in dealing with Cockney butchers. In this he felt he would be an asset to the team when it came to the critical dealing at the climax of the trek. They paused frequently to talk and laugh as they recalled the incidents of the previous night of hilarity and debauchery with the Radnor hill men.

"The poor devils don't see much of life, and I suppose that



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we were a good excuse for a night out,' said Edgar as they moved slowly on again. The loud driving cries of 'How how tarw' went echoing along the slopes of Clyro hill, as the beasts picked their heads up from grazing, and the cavalcade moved on down the long incline towards the fourteenth-century inn at Rhydspence on the English border.

The ancient house lay on the lower side of the road, its black half timbering standing out sharply in contrast to the white plaster. The herd grazed quietly at the hedgerows while the brothers celebrated their crossing into England with a draught of beer from the pewter tankards in the Rhydspence. From the window in the taproom they could see the flat meadows of the ever-widening valley of the Wye spread out across the plain. Beyond them the snow-clad mountains of Monmouthshire rose in blue shadow towards the sky, their sloping shoulders gleaming in the midday sun.

The men were soon mounted again, and quietly urging the tail-end of the drove to resume the trek towards Willersley and the first toll-gate.

'It's too dam' bad,' suddenly broke in Rhys, 'that we've got to pay at all these bloody toll-gates. There's going to be trouble some day, you mark my words. In London the people are crying out for meat, we are supplying the need and we've got to pay, pay, pay to get the cattle through.'

'Yes, there's a lot of growing bad feeling against the gates in South Wales,' replied Ivor. 'Sooner or later somebody's going to smash the bloody lot, it makes me sick.' He turned to Edgar to explain. 'The magistrates are supposed to keep the roads in good condition, with the money collected by the toll-gate keepers, but I don't know where it all goes to, they do precious little about it. They're increasing the gates and there's hardly a village now left in South Wales, but that

you've got to pay to get in and pay to get out on the other side. It's a dam' good job we don't live in Pembrokeshire, I can tell you. I don't know why they bother to bring cattle all the way from by there.'

Edgar was thinking deeply, the unfairness of it was obvious. 'Who's behind it d'you think?' he asked after a little pause.

'Oh, the roads are controlled by separate turnpike trusts, and the trustees have found the best places to put up their gates,' replied Rhys. 'They're all finding they pay well, so they're putting fresh ones up, it's going to put an end to the droving before long,' and he spat vigorously into the mud.

'But that would kill the South Wales cattle trade,' replied Edgar. 'Apart from sheep that's about all the hill farmers can produce. The sale of cattle inside South Wales wouldn't pay a man's rent, people haven't got the money.'

'Of course it wouldn't pay, they've got to be taken to the rich fattening grounds of England, where most of the farmers are too bloody lazy to breed from their own stock,' interposed Ivor. 'It's the same up north, you get the Scottish drovers bringing their stuff down over the border just as we are doing. It's been all right up to now, but it's getting hopeless. D'you know, Edgar, that in some places where farmers are responsible for the condition of a length of the road, they've actually got to pay to take a cartload of lime or culm over it afterwards.'

Edgar snorted and looked incredulously at his brother. 'Good God, man, surely something ought to be done about it,' he thundered.

'Well, the Carmarthenshire farmers aren't going to stick it for ever I can tell you,' put in Ivor. 'They're only waiting

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for somebody to start something and there'll be hell let loose in South Wales. We've stuck it long enough.'

They moved their horses on again, with a few bad-tempered shouts at the hindmost members of the herd. Then the long muddy road beside the Wye led them on to Whitney village, and some miles beyond they approached Willersley and the first toll-gate. But they decided they had gone far enough, and at the little hamlet of Winforton they arranged for a night's rest and feeding for the herd while they put up at the inn.

On the following morning they arrived at the toll barrier a mile away. It was an enormous five-barred gate painted white; it hung on a heavy oak post and reached across the muddy road to another post beside the toll-keeper's cottage. The cottage, like so many other toll houses, had windows set in angle walls that commanded views both up and down the road.

In spite of the early hour the toll-keeper was up, for he had heard of the arrival of the cattle at Winforton on the previous night. He emerged from his little house with his leather money bag dangling before him and a broad smile of welcome on his fat rubicund little face. He knew how much the drovers hated him, but if they wanted to use the Hereford road, toll would have to be paid and they could swear as much as they liked.

Old Tom Haines of Willersley was accustomed to listening to the abuse that was hurled at him by drovers who used this route; his skin was thick, insults bounced off him and he gave as good as he got. His job was an unpleasant one, and his manner of carrying it out did little to mitigate his unpopularity. Drovers with big herds were always meeting toll expenses along the route, and they rarely missed the



chance of telling old Tom exactly what they thought of him and the turnpike trusts.

Edgar felt that it was beneath his dignity to bandy words with him, however much he resented having to pay, it was unavoidable. A quick inspection of the toll-board informed him that toll for a bullock was one penny, a horse and rider was threepence.

'I've got two hundred beasts and we are five horsemen,' he shouted to the little man. 'Here's your money, open your damned gate and let us through.'

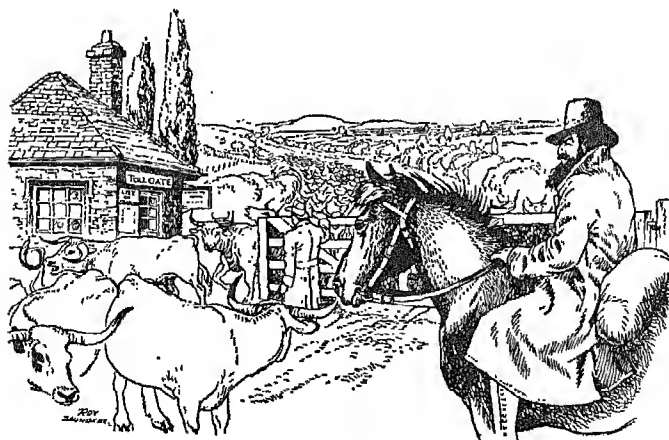
'Not quite so fast, me fine sir, I want to count 'em through one at a time if you please,' he replied, and accompanied his words by opening the gate towards the oncoming herd in such a way that if the animals pressed forward, the gate would close on to its catch. He knew from experience that

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if he opened it the other way, they might burst through in an unstoppable flood in their anxiety to keep together. It was a trick often used by crafty drovers until such keepers as Tom Haines had grown wise to it. One of the servant men held the gate ajar and allowed the bullocks to pass one at a time while the gate-keeper made a tick in his record book for every animal as it went through. When the last beast had gone, the ticks were counted up and totalled two hundred.

'I'm not in the habit of telling lies, so d'you believe me now, you pot-bellied parasite,' shouted Edgar. The Hereford yokel had been called many things during his guardianship of the turnpike gate, but the word parasite was new to him, he had no idea of its meaning and would not dream of asking for an explanation. He also felt it wiser on this occasion not to answer back. He took the seventeen and elevenpence and disappeared into his little house.

'Cold-blooded robbery I think it is,' said Ivor, as they



resumed the trek once more. 'We get a night's grazing off a field for a ha'penny a head, and we have to pay twice that much to walk them along the Hereford road, it's too damned bad.'

'Aye, aye, but the time will come soon enough when these gates will all be done away with,' replied Edgar, 'the country's bound to turn against them sooner or later, and when that time comes, your road will be open all the way to London free of all tolls, but you'll be having to pay up in some other direction, so don't worry too much about it, boy.'

They rode slowly on in the direction of Hereford, letting their imaginations wander on the eldorado of a life where toll-gates no longer existed.

'The time will come,' put in Edgar, 'when droving to London will all be finished with, anyway.'

'How d'you mean, mun?' asked Rhys.

'Well, railways of course,' replied his brother.

'They'll never make railways all the way to Wales, mun.'

'Of course they will,' said Edgar.

'But what about the hills and mountains and rivers? Jiawch, it's impossible,' Rhys protested.

'Impossible, my foot,' retorted Edgar. 'They'll make cuttings through the hills, and tunnels through the mountains, and bridges and viaducts across the valleys and gorges of the land, nothing can stop the progress of man I tell you, nothing.'

The brothers had never given much thought to the subject of railways, but Edgar's assurances began to make them think. It was Ivor who took up the argument.

'Now look here, mun,' he began, 'there's two hundred beasts in front of us, and another two hundred coming up

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with Llew, say they weigh about eight hundred weight apiece, that's about one hundred and sixty tons, how could any machine pull that lot, you're talking daft, Edgar, that'll never be possible I tell you.'

'And I tell you my friend that probably in our lifetime we'll see the railway from London reach all the way to Swansea and Carmarthen and from there it'll be going up through Llandovery and on to North Wales and all over Britain. Trains will be taking cattle all the way from Llandovery to London, and this long job of droving will be finished. Come on, I'll have a wager with you. I'll bet you five guineas that in twenty years from now there'll be no drovers, no toll-gates, and no highwaymen, the railways will have finished the lot. Will you take me on?' he shouted, holding out his hand.

'Done,' replied his brother, and they slapped hands over the bet, and roared with laughter at each other's stupidity.

'Well, it's good to think that little runt Tom Haines will be out of a job whatever, and all the other toll-keepers as well,' laughed Rhys in conclusion.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### TROUBLE AT HEREFORD

THEN at last the trek was resumed and the day passed patiently as they urged the browing cattle along the muddy road for twelve miles to the outskirts of Hereford city. The road was bad enough before the drove passed over it, but after the trampling of eight hundred iron-shod cloven hooves, it was reduced to a quagmire.

They were nearing the end of their quiet day's journey, when an incident took place which provided the drovers with a lively diversion. Behind them they could hear the notes of the post-horn of the Brecon mail coach approaching on its way to Hereford.

'Sounds to me as though he's in a desperate hurry,' said Ivor, and they turned to watch the lumbering vehicle. The four horses were finding it hard work pulling the bumping coach through the miles of slush left by the cattle, and the madcap driver was not sparing the whip on the straining animals as he urged them on to overtake the drove.

'No need for him to hurry,' replied Edgar, 'he won't be able to pass the herd this side of the city.'



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'Oh, won't he,' said Rhys. 'You don't know these brutes, they think the road was made for them.'

If there was anything that provoked Edgar it was a bully, and the coach driver appeared to be a typical specimen as he brought his vehicle up with no sign of slackening speed.

'Better stand clear, Edgar boy, or he'll run you down,' shouted Ivor as he and Rhys sidled their horses out of the way.

'Give him the road, Edgar,' they repeated. But Edgar sat his big black horse squarely in the path of the approaching vehicle. In his ignorance of English coach-driving methods of the time, he imagined that the driver would stop and then drive slowly past the herd which was already starting to panic and block the road ahead, but he was in for a rude shock as the yelling driver bore down upon him. Edgar's horse had more sense than his master, and suddenly swung clear at the last instant, nearly unseating his rider as he did so.

'Highwaymen and cattle thieves,' roared the driver as he thundered by and swung his whip at the honest drovers.

The colour drained away from Edgar's face as he saw the horses blundering and prancing through the frantic herd. He dug his heels into his horse's side and surged after the coach.

'Leave him alone, mun,' shouted his brothers, only too well aware of the penalty for interfering with a driver of Her Majesty's mail coach on the highway. There was no reply as the rider charged in between the mud-sprayed cattle and caught up with the coach.

The driver had considered the men to be merely a group of quiet Welsh cattle drovers. In company with all his bullying fraternity, he exercised an ill-mannered dictatorship over all other users of the highway, and no resistance was ever offered. Suddenly he noticed the drover on the black horse galloping up on him, and he looked down into the

face of a Dragoon Guards Commander at the height of a cavalry charge. He raised his whip, and brought it down at Edgar, but it was too long to be useful at such close quarters, and it was seized and torn from his grasp. As the rider closed in on him the driver raised his foot to ward him off, and as he did so, the bearded giant reached out and grabbed it, and the driver was torn from his seat to hang head downwards suspended by one foot from the vice-like grip of the drover, who continued his ride for some distance between the galloping herd, until the bully's struggles ceased, then he was lifted and flung into the gutter, and Edgar rode slowly back to the waiting coach.

He fully realised the implications of his act in assaulting a man in charge of Her Majesty's mail coach, and decided to take the bull by the horns and bluff his way out of his predicament. The coach horses had stopped and stood gasping with heaving sides beneath a cloud of steam, the assistant postillion had gathered up the reins and sat with a terrified expression on his face as though awaiting his turn for the mud treatment; two frightened passengers were staring out of the window, and the general effect of the vehicle was very different from the fearsome thing it was when in the charge of the mad driver. Edgar was livid with indignation as he arrived at the stationary coach.

'I want that man's name and the number of this coach,' he roared. 'I want him put under custody in Hereford jail tonight. I intend to charge him with damage to my property, assault upon my person, exposing the lives of his passengers to grave risk, driving to the danger of the public on Her Majesty's highway, driving without due regard for the safety of Her Majesty's mail,' and before announcing the final item on his long list of charges, he drew himself very

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upright on his horse and paused before adding, 'I wish to charge him with defamation of character relating to an officer and a gentleman of Her Majesty's British Army.' His speech was uttered with such thunder and the frequent allusions to Her Majesty, reiterated with such pompous profundity, that his listeners quailed visibly before him. 'And what is more,' he added, 'I have four witnesses to testify to the truth of my statements against you three,' and he glared with such unmitigated venom at the two elderly men in the coach that no word of protest was forthcoming from them.

'As for you two gentlemen,' he boomed, 'you had better hold yourselves in readiness to be subpoenaed as witnesses in the trial of that wretch. It's high time that users of Her Majesty's highways should be protected from such swine.'

As he boomed into his final peroration, the luckless driver, who had recovered sufficiently, returned along the road sullen, frightened, and drenched with mud from head to foot.

Edgar waved his whip towards his seat.

'Get to your station,' he commanded in a way that no man ever refused. 'Stay where you are until I tell you to move. I'm retaining this whip until your trial.'

With that he turned away to follow the herd, and the coach moved slowly and respectfully behind them.

On the outskirts of Hereford they stopped at the drovers' field, and after discussions with the owner, the gate was opened and the cattle were counted in for the night. Then one of the drovers suddenly and mysteriously turned his horse towards the city and galloped away. Edgar silently waved the coach on and he and his companions trotted beside it into the suburbs of Hereford. He had taken the precaution of despatching Ivor to find the city watchman on duty, and bring him to the coaching inn where the

vehicle was due to pass the night. When it arrived with its posse of outriders, the driver was taken in charge and escorted to the lock-up.

Then Edgar was directed to the house of the chief magistrate. The little maid who answered the knocking on the door, was petrified with fright when she saw by the light of her lantern the enormous mud-stained giant who loomed in the doorway. He was never in the habit of requesting, particularly of servants, he demanded to see the Justice of the Peace on a matter of some urgency, and gave his full name and titles. He was invited into a cold room and a candle was lighted on the sideboard. His Worship was not long in putting in an appearance, and the sight of the great drover towering amidst the effeminate collection of Georgian bric-à-brac that filled the room, took him by surprise. From the name delivered by his maid, he had expected to find a grandly dressed soldier, his surprise immediately betrayed his disappointment. But he was not left long in suspense as to the identity of his visitor. The long-winded niceties of Georgian introductions were dispensed with as Edgar went straight to the point.

‘For many years,’ he began, ‘my family has been engaged in taking meat from Wales to London on the hoof, and they have been sorely harassed by your English footpads, trouble-makers, highwaymen and stage-coach drivers. I have been granted leave of absence from Her Majesty’s armed forces, to assist my family and promote a greater measure of peace and security on the roads of England. Today, after paying full toll duty on two hundred cattle at Willersley, my stock was damaged by the Brecon stage coach because the driver refused to slow down. I pulled him from his seat and gave him the drubbing in the mud which he deserved. He now

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awaits Your Worship's pleasure in the detention house.' Then he proceeded to enumerate the formidable list of charges which he intended to bring against the man at the next meeting of the court.

'I claim, sir, that if an example be made of this swine of the Highway, the news of it will flash round the land and the roads of England will become a safer place through your intercedence. In ten days from now I will be in London and unless I can be promised the co-operation of your court here in Hereford, I will make it my business to seek audience with the Lord Chief Justice of England in the matter.'

Edgar's long experience in the procedure of Military Courts of Justice and Enquiry, gave him the confidence of his conviction, and he knew the most telling words to use at the end of a speech for the prosecution. The little dignitary was swept off his feet by the eloquence of his determined visitor, in some measure akin to the way in which the driver had been swept off his. He readily offered his full co-operation in the matter and promised that the man would be tried at the next assize meeting at Hereford.

'In the morning,' continued Edgar, 'I will instruct a notary to act on my behalf, you will be hearing from him, and now, sir, I would like to wish you a very good night.' He was not particularly interested in what the little J.P. had to say on the matter, he had stated his case and delivered his ultimatum, then he was shown out into the darkened street.

Back at the inn his two brothers awaited his return and greeted him with a rapturous welcome. Then with a quart tankard in his hand he proceeded to relate the details of his interview with the magistrate, and the promises which he had extracted from him, amidst roars of laughter which made the candles flicker.

## TROUBLE AT HEREFORD

The rest of the night passed in the usual conviviality which the atmosphere of such ancient houses of hospitality never failed to stimulate in these long-distance riders of the road.

On the following morning a notary was sought out and briefed with the details of the coach incident of the previous day, and the list of charges that were to be preferred against the driver were written down and signed by Edgar. It was drawing on for midday before the drove was guided through the side streets of the city and out along the road to Ledbury. The sun was shining and the warm air of spring made them all feel good as they walked their horses slowly in the wake of the cattle. But in spite of the beauty of the day, an under-current of resentment still brooded against the toll-gates in the minds of the three brothers.

The warm afternoon wore slowly on, and everywhere about them farm labourers were toiling in the fields, ploughing up the rich soil in readiness for the sowing of crops. Many of the ploughmen would halt their teams and come running over the furrows to look at the long string of black cattle as it passed, the pastoral produce of one land threading its way through the agrarian produce of another land.

Gradually the sun sank lower over the Hereford plain behind them, and the road began to undulate as they moved into a land of gentle hills. Far ahead of them the soft grey line of the high round hills of Malvern grew slowly nearer on the eastern skyline.

With the coming of evening they reached the outskirts of Ledbury and counted their cattle into the drovers' field, and the three brothers rode on into the little town. At the Feathers Inn the horses were stabled for the night, and a noisy welcome greeted them from the landlord as they entered the bar.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUSPECTED AMBUSH ON THE MALVERNS

RHYS and Ivor were always sadly at fault when it came to the simple graces of the ordinary civilities of life. This was particularly marked on the subject of introducing their brother to friends whom they happened to meet. Edgar had mentioned this lapse to them on several occasions, but for some reason they continued to fight shy of presenting him by formal introduction, and in consequence he would invariably take a back seat until at some point in the conversation he would burst in and introduce himself with thinly veiled sarcasm at his brothers' boorishness.

The situation at the Feathers Inn in the quaint little town of Ledbury, followed the usual pattern. The brothers had always stayed there on previous journeys, and were soon exchanging yarns with mine host and drinking quart for quart while Edgar, as in the early stages of such reunions, sat back in moody silence. On this occasion he sat back further than usual in the shadows of the chimney and was forgotten in the excited talk that went on between the landlord and his brothers. There was something about the man that quickened Edgar's curiosity. His fifteen years in the

continent of India had taught him a great deal about human nature. In addition to his army service he had often been involved in the Intelligence and Secret Service departments. As a spawning ground of spies, and the double dealing of mercenary international agents and undercover chicanery, the alleyways of nineteenth-century India had no equal in the world. Edgar had dealt with many oily customers in his life, but as he listened to the brawling chatter of his brothers he watched the age-old confidence trick of the innkeeper. He was flattering Rhys and Ivor into thinking that they were a pair of neo-saints for taking the trouble to walk so many cattle to the poor starving people of London. Edgar felt that he had never seen a more wily scoundrel at work. At first his revulsion at the man's petty inquisitiveness nearly got the better of him, but he stayed quietly in his chimney corner and heard his brothers tell of their proposed visit to the capital. As he listened to the landlord's talk he tried to piece together the jigsaw puzzle that held him spellbound. He could see no point in this prolonged flattery, where simple questions were cleverly couched in leading statements that led the guileless drovers on. How they would sell, who they would sell to, whether the beasts would be immediately killed for meat or go on for further fattening, how long would they have to wait for payment. Edgar knew that sooner or later one clue would solve the whole problem that troubled him over the innkeeper's curiosity. When at last it came, it escaped even his trained mind. Gradually the conversation turned to the affairs of Ledbury, the inn, and the landlord's family, and when at last he left the two drovers, Edgar was still puzzled.

After retiring to bed he continued to brood over the conversation and lay awake for some hours. At last he got



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up and dressed, then quietly crept out of the inn into the silence of the spring night.

It was only a mile back along the road to the ha'penny field where the cattle had been turned in, and it was not worth saddling the horse. The night was alight with stars, and the cool scent of approaching spring came from the damp earth of the sleeping world about him. He strode on for a quarter of an hour until he reached the field where the herd was resting. It looked as though they were all there, it was quite obvious that no one had disturbed them in the immediate past, as most of them were lying down either asleep or chewing the cud. He tried to count them from the gate, but each time the count was always slightly out, so he had to give it up. It was obvious that they had not been disturbed and none had been stolen, or during his stay at the gate there would have been some bellowing from cattle left behind.

He walked back silently in the silent night, and approached the Feathers on tiptoe, crept indoors and was soon fast asleep beside his snoring brothers.

After a hasty breakfast, they set off with the landlord's good wishes ringing in their ears.

'He's one of the best, is old Braithewaite,' said Ivor, and his brother agreed with him.

'I'm not so sure myself,' replied Edgar. 'I haven't made my mind up about him yet.'

'Braithewaite's a great landlord, pity there aren't a few more like 'im on the road, we'd be better off,' said Rhys. 'He likes the drovers.'

Edgar could see that his brothers had fallen for the inn-keeper's charm, and until he had solved his problem, there was no point in starting an argument about his supposed vices or virtues.

They counted two hundred cattle as they passed through the gate, and resumed the trek on payment of 8s. 4d. to the owner of the field.

Two miles beyond the town the road climbed steeply through dense woodlands and the green acres of Hereford opened ever wider behind them as they climbed. They took it very slowly and allowed the animals to browse beside the road for two hours. During the whole climb Edgar brooded on the memory of the landlord's talk, until at last he dismissed it from his mind as they emerged above the forest on to an open spur of the Malvern hills. It was a splendid spectacle, the tapestry of England spread further and further as it unrolled behind them. The rich green landscape was chequered with the brown of freshly turned ploughland, and smoke-wreathed hamlets peeped from the sheltered cushioning of the woods.

As they rode through the rocky gap at the top of the pass, Ivor turned to his brothers with a chance remark. 'Here's a good spot for a hold-up on the way back when we've got the money with us. There's not a house for a mile on either side of this God-forsaken spot, a gang could easy jump out of the rocks and take us by surprise.'

'Yes, but how would they know we was coming?' asked Rhys.

Edgar reined in his horse, and on his big sunburnt face there spread the light of understanding. 'I'll tell you simple idiots how they'll know,' he shouted. 'You have almost told that damned innkeeper the exact date of our return over these hills. You explained everything to him. He'll know to the day when we'll reach London and sell the cattle, then you went to great pains to tell him that we couldn't receive payment until three weeks later from the butchers. Then he

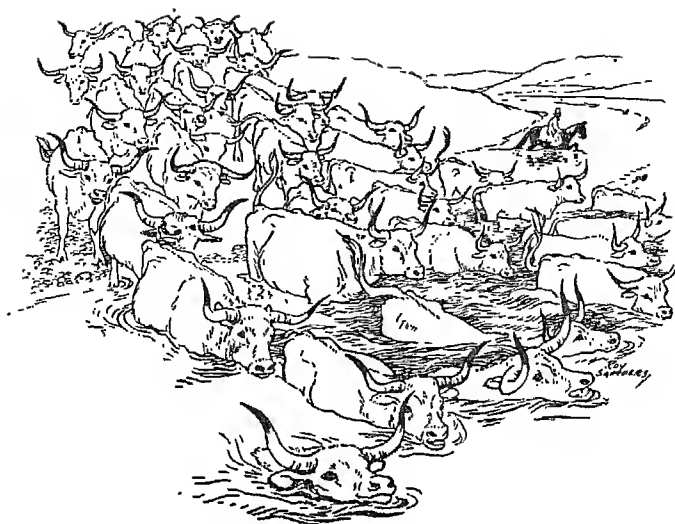
## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

can easily calculate the speed of our return, and know almost to the day when we'll reach this spot, and have an ambush waiting for us. It's all as clear as daylight now, thank God that one of us has got brains. Now we know, we'll be ready for them,' and he roared with laughter at the relief from the nagging worry of his puzzle. The threat of the ambush caused him no concern at all, and he was his old gay buoyant self once more as he urged his horse on to follow the herd down the rough road into the woodlands on the other side of the mountain that overlooked the spreading Worcester plain.

The bells of Malvern Priory were ringing in the distance as they emerged from the belt of trees into the straggling village of Little Malvern. The strange feeling of loneliness on the high hill, with its threat of an ambush, had scared Rhys and Ivor into silence, while Edgar talked on to elucidate the whole sequence of the innkeeper's conversation. He pointed out how he had not asked one direct question but had merely led them on to tell him all he needed to know for the planning of his reception party.

The ex-guardsman roared with laughter. 'Be damned if I won't send him a letter to tell him when to air the beds for us, and before we leave that den I'll smash the very daylight's out of him until he confesses, and we'll take the blackguard, bound and gagged, to Hereford jail with us. By God we will, you mark my words.'

They passed through Welland and came to the village of Upton on Severn where they spent the night. On the following morning they reached the Severn, where the cattle were induced to swim across the river. Then they plodded on by lanes and side roads to avoid the toll-gates of the highway. Everywhere along the route they attracted atten-



tion, and the yokels of Worcestershire never missed a chance to watch the passing cavalcade, and shout loud greetings and pass remarks in a dialect that was quite incomprehensible to the drovers.

They forded the Avon to the village of Bredon's Norton and followed the open trackway over Bredon Hill then down into the Cotswold valley of the Ibourne and on again by a lonely road to the outskirts of Broadway. The cattle had travelled well, but were glad to gain access to a field and a long rest for the night, while the brothers rode into the village to indulge in the hospitality of the Lygon Arms.

From Broadway to the heart of London they reckoned by their rough and ready methods, that the distance was about a hundred miles. Rhys and Ivor had done the trek twice a year since they had started droving in their teens, and now they were bordering thirty years of age. They had already

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

covered a hundred miles from home, and thus the Lygon Arms was regarded as the half-way house between Glan Towy farm and Smithfield market, and being Saturday night it was a place and time for celebration. The Cotswold shepherds who visited the Lygon Arms that night for a quiet pint were made painfully aware of the fact that the Welsh cattle drovers were in celebrating mood.

In one corner of the main taproom stood a little porcelain sink, and above it a number of pheasants' tail feathers hung from a rack. When the roaring revellers had drunk until they could hold no more, a journey to the sink became necessary. One at a time they staggered towards it to the accompaniment of encouraging roars of drunken laughter from the other revellers of the inn. On reaching the sink a feather would be grabbed and pushed down the reveller's throat when the most recently swallowed quarts of Cotswold home brew would be violently regurgitated into the waiting trough to a rousing cheer from the others. Then tankards would be replenished and quart for quart they would drink again until another visit became inevitable. At midnight they staggered away to bed and slept until midday, and being Sunday they remained at Broadway and rested until Monday morning.

The following week's trek took them ever eastward from the Cotswolds by lanes and side roads well known to the brothers to avoid the highway toll-gates.

They proceeded without incident to Banbury, then on to Buckingham, and on the third night reached the tiny village of Leighton Buzzard.

## CHAPTER NINE

### OVER THE CHILTERNs

FROM Leighton Buzzard they drove out along the Hemel Hempstead road. But the watchful Rhys soon turned them on to a by-road to avoid the toll-gates which he knew existed on the Hemel Hempstead highway.

'Too much traffic on this road,' he had shouted as he raced on to seek the turning for the village of Markyate street. Coaches and riders had become more frequent as they drew nearer to London and Rhys took a great pride in his knowledge of the by ways of England, both on account of avoiding traffic as well as toll-gates.

The cattle had grown accustomed to the long march, and their peaceful willingness to follow the beast in front, was the simple fact that made the great trek possible. The steady ten miles a day, spread out between dawn and dusk, left much time for quiet grazing and long rests when open country afforded the chance, and did little to tax their strength.

Far ahead of them, the riders could see the smooth chalk hills of the Chilterns. They passed through the villages of Eaton Green, Eaton Bray, Idlesborough, and at last they

crossed the road from Dunstable to Tring and reached the open slopes of the Chilterns about the district of Whipsnade.

The cattle moved slowly up the slopes of the open downland, and spent an hour or more at the top, cropping the spring grass that grew from the chalky soil. The men dismounted, tied their horses to a bush, and sat on the sloping turf to view the great expanse of the plain of Bedfordshire that spread away to the north-east, and the run of the Chilterns that stretched to the south-west past Ivinghoe Beacon where bare white chalk escarpments swept up from the plain.

As farmers they viewed the unusual landscape with critical eyes, the lay of a hedge, the strength of a fence, the shape of a rick, the turn of a ploughed furrow, the condition of distant livestock, and the general lay-out of fields and the agricultural pattern of the lonely land that lay below them.

'D'you know one thing that nobody at home will believe, Edgar?' said Rhys to his brother. 'They won't believe that the earth of these hills by here is white. It's a funny thing, but they see so little themselves, and they believe everything we tells them about London, and we tells enough lies too, sometimes, and they swallows the lot, but if you say anything about grass growing out of white earth they just laugh at you; now you can tell 'em, perhaps they'll believe you.'

'All right, I'll back you up,' said Edgar with a smile.

Ivor had already stretched himself out on the warm ground and was soon fast asleep, while the other two yarned on about the limited vision of the countryfolk of their day. It was a pleasant spot on that bright afternoon, and over the length and breadth of the vast landscape there was no sign of any human being until at last a cloud of dust appeared on

the distant road between Tring and Dunstable which they had recently crossed.

'Something over there,' said Edgar, pointing out the moving speck that left a floating trail of white dust behind it.

'A coach and horses by the look of it, the Luton to Aylesbury stage coach probably,' replied his brother after a close scrutiny.

As the moving object approached the foot of the hill which they had climbed, it became more easily recognisable as a coach pulled by four horses.

'It's a good job we haven't got the herd on that narrow road in front of that fool,' remarked Rhys, as they watched the speed of the oncoming vehicle. In all the vast panoply of that rural scene the coach was the only thing that moved, and the two men watched its lurching movement on the twisting road below them. Then as it approached a belt of trees that stood at right angles to the road, it suddenly came to a standstill in a cloud of dust.

'I wonder why he's stopped,' asked Edgar, and the two men watched with growing interest, then they noticed a lone horseman move into view from the shadow of the line of trees, and approach the awkward vehicle.

'By gad, if it isn't a hold-up,' shouted Edgar, leaping to his feet. 'Come on, Rhys boy, let's catch the swine.' They grabbed their horses and leaping into the saddles, took the downward slope at a fast gallop. At the foot of the hill they could see the stationary coach among the trees and the highwayman astride his horse was addressing the occupants. To approach unseen over the open downland was impossible for Edgar and Rhys, and it was inevitable that the sound of their galloping horses would disturb the thief. He heard them and turned to look. The spectacle of Edgar Morgan



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in a cavalry charge had frightened braver men than the Dunstable highwayman, and he decided to make a hasty departure. He had barely started, when there came the roar of a blunderbuss from the coach top, and a well-aimed shot by the coachman toppled him off his horse.

'You catch his horse, Rhys. I'll deal with him if he gets up,' shouted Edgar as they reached the road. But the highwayman lay where he had landed, gasping out his end in the white dust of the Dunstable road. Edgar dismounted and took the pistols from the dying man's pockets, as Rhys came up with the captured horse from one direction and the coach moved up on the other side.

'Good shooting, coachman,' was Edgar's greeting as the vehicle drew up and the driver dismounted to search the thief. Frightened faces appeared at the window and viewed the two big bearded strangers with fresh alarm. To the genteel occupants of the coach who had already been unnerved by the familiar cry of 'stand and deliver,' the sight of these two travel-stained giants with their unusual accents, gave them fresh cause for alarm. But it soon became obvious that the intervention of the strangers had saved the situation.

'What are you going to do with him?' asked Rhys.

'Do wiv him,' echoed the coachman. 'What d'ye think we does with the loikes of these carrion. 'E'll be hoisted up in the gibbet irons of Dunstable o' course, unless the Tring folk come for 'im first.'

To Rhys Morgan, whose respect for the dead had already caused him to remove his hat, it was a shocking revelation from the ruthless coachman.

'Aye, 'tis thanks to you gentlemen that 'e took wing and gave me the chance to put a shot into 'is back. Let's shove 'n off the road. There's far too many of these types 'creabouts,

this 'un took me by surprise,' and so saying he lugged the body into the gutter beside the road. 'That's about where 'e belongs,' he concluded, clapping the dust off his hands. 'I'll fill up the details in me log book tonight. Thank ye once again gentlemen.' Then, after tying the highwayman's horse to the back of his coach, he climbed up to his box and with a flourish of the whip, lumbered away in the direction of Tring.

Rhys was still shaken by the event and looked at his brother for guidance, which was soon forthcoming.

'Well, Rhys, fy machgeni, that didn't take long,' said the old soldier, 'let's get back to the herd.' Then, mounting their horses, they rode up the slope to where their brother lay snoring peacefully in the afternoon sun. They retied their mounts to the bush and sat down in their original positions. When Ivor awoke he was told the story of the hold-up at the foot of the hill, which he refused to believe until the recumbent figure of the dead man was pointed out to him at the edge of the roadway far below. Then the herd was rounded up and they moved on over the open downs, until they descended to a great main road.

At the village of Markyatestreet they once again put up for the night. The hamlet lay flanking the great highway of Watling Street which connected London with the north-west. Somewhat ruefully the two experienced drovers informed Edgar that for the rest of the journey they would now have to keep to the main highway all the way into London.

'Remember now, Edgar,' said Ivor, 'we don't want no trouble with mail coach drivers.'

'That depends on the drivers,' was his calm reply.

'Yes, but everything's got to give the road to the mails here, they've got their timetable and they travels fast between

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stages on this road as they go north,' explained Rhys. 'There's no more side roads for us now and we've got to go quiet through the traffic. It's Thursday night tonight, tomorrow night we'll be in St Albans, Saturday night we'll be in Edgware, and Sunday night in Smithfield ready for Monday morning in the market. They only sell for the butchers on Mondays, so we don't want no delays on the way in, or we'll miss the market and have to wait a week.'

'Is it only one day a week they sell cattle, then?' asked Edgar.

'Yes, of course, mun,' replied Ivor. 'Only on Mondays the butchers' mart is held, terrible place it is, too. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays they sell corn, hay and straw, and on Fridays they sell horses, milking cows and store cattle, but it's Monday is the butchers' day and we must be there in time, so we don't want no delays Edgar, remember now.'

The earnestness with which the two brothers pleaded with Edgar to restrain his feelings over the behaviour of coach drivers, was impressive. He could see the purpose behind their arguments. It had taken careful planning over the last hundred miles to ensure their entry into the city on Sunday morning to catch the Monday market, and he agreed at last to causing no delays at this critical stage.

'Llewelyn and Dewi are about a week behind us,' explained Rhys, 'and he'll be coming here seven days from now so as to catch Smithfield on Monday week and then we'll all be finished for this trip. We don't want to be delayed till then, and present the four hundred Welsh blacks for sale at the same time, d'you see the point, Edgar?' he concluded.

'Come on drink up, boys,' said Edgar. 'I won't cause any bother.' The remainder of the evening passed off in the usual harmony to which they had grown accustomed. When the landlord was invited to join them, they told him of the

attempted robbery incident on the road between Tring and Dunstable.

'Oh, ah,' said the landlord, 'that be a terrible lonely road just there, but it's nothing loik so bad as it were in Tom Dun's day. Oh, ah, that were the time, so they do say. 'E were the Robin 'Ood of these parts, ye might say, long time ago.'

'Most places throughout the country seem to have their Robin Hoods,' replied Edgar. 'We've got one in our valley at home in Wales, Tw'n Shon Catti his name was.'

But the landlord was not interested in anyone else's local scoundrels, Tom Dun of Dunstable, four miles away, had come to his mind and these travellers had to hear about him.

'Terrible man was our Tom Dun I can tell ye,' he continued. 'Leader of a big gang 'e was, and stables 'is horses in a chalk hollow on the downs above where the town now stands, that's where the town gits its name, Dun's stable, see. The old tales about 'im are many. 'E once stopped a waggoner on the road to Bedford, stabbed 'n and buried 'n beside the road, and drove the waggon into Bedford and sold the lot and then disappeared. 'E and 'is gang became the terror o' these parts, and at last the Sheriff sent a powerful force to attack 'n, but Dun's men beat 'em and 'anged all the prisoners. Then they dressed up in the clothes of the Sheriff's men and went off to a nearby castle with a yarn that Tom Dun was hidin' inside, they were allowed to search for 'n and once inside they looted the place good 'n proper. But the best joke of all was when 'e 'eard about a big dinner for a party of lawyers in a Bedford tavern. 'E went in an hour before lawyers came, pretendin' to be one o' their servants, and told the landlord 'ow to lay out the meal. When the gatherin' was seated, old Tom bustled to and fro very business-like. Ye see the point, the lawyers thought 'e was

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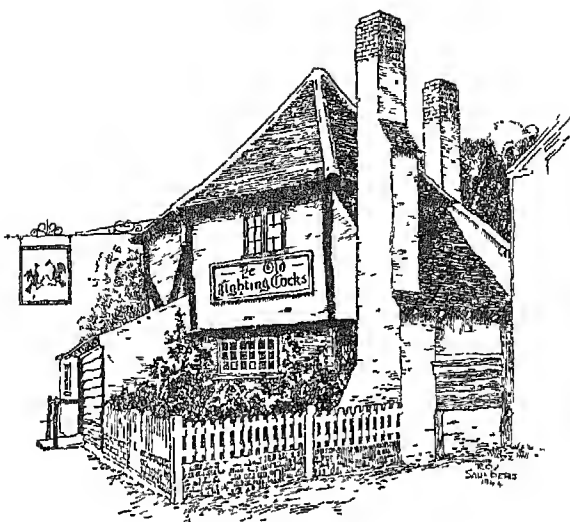
a servant of the landlord, and landlord thought 'e was a servant o' the lawyers. When they calls for the bill, old Tom collects all the money to take to the landlord, and that's the last that any of them saw of 'n. Oh, ah, 'e were a right smart 'n I can tell ye. But they done for 'n in the end, and when they tried to 'ang 'n 'e put up such a fight that special 'elp 'ad to be called for. 'E gave 'em so much trouble that they cut 'is 'ands off first, then they chopped 'im off at the elbows, then they chopped 'is feet off and then 'is legs and finished up by choppin' off 'is 'ead.

'Oh, ah, this be the place for 'ighwaymen all right, between 'ere and London they rides, all the main coach roads leadin' out o' the city's infested wi' 'em. You watch out tomorrow, but there, I don't think they'm likely to trouble you gentlemen. You look to me as though you seen a bit o' fightin', sir,' he said, addressing himself to Edgar.

Normally Edgar would have taken the opportunity of enlarging on his service tales of India, but conscious of the fact that his two brothers had heard them all so many times at the various taverns at which they had called, he merely assured the landlord that he certainly had seen some action in his time and left it at that.

On the next day they journeyed along the great Highway of Watling Street. At Redbourn village they paid toll for the herd, and in the evening came without further incident to the outskirts of the ancient city of St Albans. The splendid cathedral tower made of Roman tiles and bricks, glowed in the warm rays of the evening sunlight and made a rewarding picture to the eyes of the men as they rode into the city after folding the herd under the care of the two servant men.

In spite of the architectural grandeur of the great Norman cathedral, and the unique Roman remains that were still



*England's oldest inhabited house*

visible after the passage of nearly seventeen centuries, the interests of Rhys and Ivor extended only to the little hostelry known as the Fighting Cocks.

'It's the oldest inhabited house in England,' they explained to Edgar as they approached it at the foot of the cathedral hill, and it became immediately apparent to Edgar why his brothers had shown such an unusual interest in the historic building as he noticed the inn sign that hung outside, and heard the singing that came from its interior. The horses were soon tied to the railings and the three huge men ducked their heads to enter the little place and end their day as every droving day was ended:

*With their feet to the logs,  
On the piled up dogs,  
In the snug old chimney corner.*

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE WELSH HERD ARRIVES AT SMITHFIELD

AS they approached the outskirts of Edgware village on the following day, a discussion was started on the relative merits of the two great markets of Barnet and Smithfield, and it was the business philosophy of Rhys that decided the issue.

'I think we should leave Barnet alone on this trip,' he said. 'It's a bit too far out from London, mostly dealers and farmers goes there for thin store cattle to fatten up. This lot of ours have done fine on the road, weather's been good and we haven't rushed 'em, they should make a decent price in Smithfield. That's where all the London butchers go, and that's what we always do when we've got a good bunch like this. If we can sell straight to the retailers it's better than botherin' with middlemen. I'll wager that Llew will make for Smithfield if his lot are as good as ours, and we've promised to meet him at the Lock and Key Tavern by Smithfield, anyway, so let's push on from by here tomorrow, is it.'

The fact of the matter was that as they had been the first drove of the year to pass along the route, the cattle had enjoyed the first bite on each of the fields where they had passed the night. This continual variety of ungrazed herbage

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in their nightly browsing of the spring flush, had begun to tell its tale, and their black coats shone in the April sunshine. It was obvious that the retailer market of Smithfield in the heart of London would yield the better price.

Both Ivor and Edgar readily agreed, and so the last night of the two hundred miles trek was passed at the King George Tavern in the village of Edgware, before they resumed the final ten miles of their journey, into the slums and grandeur of London.

On the morning when they left Painscastle, high in the Radnor hills, they had planned each day's move in order to reach London by Sunday night. The butchers' market of fat stock at Smithfield always started at dawn on Mondays, and the numbers were so great that livestock had to be in position on the previous night. So in the early dawn of that sabbath morning, the Welshmen released the herd from its Edgware grazing ground, and guided them out along the highway that followed the straight line, first planned by the Romans, of ancient Watling Street. The great black column as usual broke into a confused roar of bellowing as cattle had become separated from each other during the process of leaving the field, and the customary search for companions as always, had to be allowed by the drovers. At last the cattle sorted themselves out to resume the quiet march of the day. The sleepers of Edgware must have cursed the disturbers of their slumber as the noise kept them awake, until it gradually faded away in the direction of the city.

By the time they reached the outskirts of London, the cattle 'families' had linked up once more and the leaders were content to follow the leading horseman, as the long lines of houses began to flank the wide road. It was still early in the morning and being Sunday, there was no traffic, and during



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the early stage of their entry into the city they had the granite cobbled highway to themselves. The cattle had become accustomed to passing through towns, and crowds of people and yapping dogs no longer caused them to panic, the herding instinct kept them together and where the first bullock led, one hundred and ninety-nine others followed willingly.

The Morgan family of Glan Towy in the parish of Cilcwm had been brought up in strict observance of the Welsh sabbath. Their mother, Rebecca, had seen to it that on Sundays only the minimum amount of work was done on the farm, and when Rebecca made decrees her menfolk accepted them without question. The little village church at Cilcwm had always ruled their day, and as they moved into the sleeping outskirts of the city, the lifetime teaching of their mother and the influence of the times reacted on the minds of Rhys and Ivor.

From far and near the sound of church bells broke over the sleeping suburbs, awakening a quiet sense of guilt in the two men.

'Good job it is that they at home can't see us this morning,' was the thought in the minds of the two churchmen.

'What would old Jack Bryn Gwyn say if he could see us now,' said Ivor suddenly.

'Aye, there'd be some long faces,' replied his brother. 'Remember that wet summer six years ago when Banc y Berllan carted his hay on that fine Sunday, it was the talk of Llandovery and he's never been forgiven for it.'

'What are you fools talking about?' demanded Edgar. 'D'you mean to tell me that because a man took advantage of a dry week-end to cart his hay on a Sunday that the neighbours took exception to it?'

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'Edgar bach,' replied his brother. 'You should know better than to ask such a daft question, of course everyone took exception to 'im, and he was mentioned in every pulpit, church and chapel in Llandovery, Llandilo and Lampeter. Everyone was talking about nothing else for weeks, particularly as it rained solid from the Monday on, and crops was all lost,' he added. 'D'you know, Edgar, that wherever any Llandovery farmers went after that, they was *all* teased for sabbath breakin'.'

Edgar had always been a staunch churchman, and his knowledge of the Bible was greater than most people gave him credit for, and after some moments' reflection he replied:

'Who do you chaps think found most favour in the Lord's eyes during the following winter? Dai Jones Banc y Berllan with his well-fed stock kept on good hay, or the sanctimonious beggars who were so afraid of each other's opinions that they had to starve their animals on bad musty hay. You boys have never missed a meal in your lives, have you? I have. For three days and nights I was kept a prisoner when captured by Pathans in India. They never gave me a bite, and on the fourth night I escaped. There are few greater crimes than starving animals that you are responsible for. You know what Shakespeare said:

"Oh Lord who lent me life,  
Lend me a heart replete with thankfulness."

If you put the word kindness instead of the word thankfulness you'd be getting nearer to what God expects of farmers, so drop your hypocrisy, lads, to hell with public opinion of that sort, say I.'

The church bells of north London rang out far and wide across the rooftops, and the eight hundred iron-shod feet of

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the cattle made a fearsome din on the cobbled road. Churchgoers were moving along the pavements in their Sunday best, the men in black frock coats and top hats, and the women in billowing skirts, shawled and bonneted for service. The black cavalcade of beef moved steadily down the wide straight highway which had seen so much history; the produce of the Welsh hills was approaching the end of its great journey.

Gradually the suburban architecture improved, the simple whitewashed walls and predominating straw thatching of roofs gave place to more substantial Georgian façades with tile or slate roofs. Doorways were embellished with neo-classic columns and porticoes, steps led up to them. Iron railings appeared with bow windows, ornamented woodwork and classic mouldings. The houses grew in size and forbidding style and pomp that reflected the ever-growing scale of fortunes of those that dwelt therein. As the drovers moved slowly nearer to the heart of the great city, they were able to observe how the industrial development of Britain was reflected in the growing splendour of the city's architecture, the visible expression of the national wealth: its iron works, foundries, factories, shipping trade and the cumulative revenue from colonial expansion. With each half-mile the splendour of Renaissance façades appeared over bigger buildings. The revival of classic architecture in Italy and France had spread to Britain, and the Georgian designers had modified the traditions set by Sir Christopher Wren. Through this wonderland of pristine architectural pomp of Portland stone, the living produce of the wild Welsh hills approached its journey's end. Several turnpikes barred their way and caused them great delay. The last of these was the Tyburn turnpike where Marble Arch now stands. Then they

#### THE WELSH HERD ARRIVES AT SMITHFIELD

proceeded along the length of Oxford Street until they reached the vast warren of slums that lay between it and the Holburn. It was fortunate that they had chosen tea-time on a Sunday afternoon to negotiate the congerie of slums, and the leading cattle easily followed the first horseman through the dreadful alleyways until they reached the Holburn, and the way ahead was clear at last.

Each year as the drovers came to London, they always found changes in the route to Smithfield. The squalid region between Oxford Street and Holburn decreased in size through slum clearance on each visit. The Fleet Market with its bazaars and hovels still filled Farringdon Street. The Strand was choked with Crosse's Menagerie and the Exeter Change. The Haymarket lived up to its name. Old London Bridge, with its ancient houses and shops, had recently been demolished and a splendid new bridge had been built beside its foundations in 1826. Magnificent terraces of tall houses were being laid out in Regent's Park and many other places. Church schools, mansions, offices, palaces and public buildings were continually being erected in the great Renaissance style which was so easily adapted to buildings of Civic pride.

When they reached the end of the Holburn, the identity of the herd as a natural animal group came to an end. In the great triangular space before St Bartholomew's Hospital, Smithfield Market was reached at last and the great journey was over. This was their journey's end, Smithfield Market, the biggest live-stock cattle mart in the world, where a quarter of a million beasts and a million and a half sheep were sold on the hoof each year.

It was late in the afternoon when they started to guide the leading bullocks between the parallel oaken railings with which the great space was lined. Other herds had already

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appeared, and were tethered in lines to the wooden rails, hundreds more would be in position by the morning. On every Monday and Friday, as many as four thousand beasts would change hands, and during the centuries of its use, the thought of washing the place had never occurred to anyone. The stench that arose from the churned up mud as the long river of black beasts floundered through that crowded place, was beyond description. The drovers rode with them, shouting at the crowds to let the stock through until they were guided into one of the unoccupied railed lanes where the men were able to keep the herd together, and the long job of tying each one to the rail was started. The work was hard and strenuous in the close-packed mass of bullocks in the lane. They fought and wrestled with each member of the herd until they were all tethered by short halters of rope that were fixed to the railings, and the two hundred black bullocks stood side by side in a long line. It was dark by the time the drovers had completed this feat of strength, and the ever-growing noise of the shouting men and roaring beasts was deafening. Fresh herds of bewildered animals continued to pour in, guided by English drovers and farmers, each man holding a flaring torch which threw a lurid glow over his immediate surroundings and heightened the ghastly scene of turmoil, confusion and brutality that went on throughout the hours of darkness. Cattle from the North Downs, the Weald, Epping Forest, the plains of Norfolk and Bedford, the Chiltern hills and the Thames valley, arrived until most of the railed spaces were occupied. Then the drovers disappeared into their various lodging-houses and taverns that surrounded the market, to pass the night.

The Welshmen repaired to a tavern called the Lock and Key, a place much frequented by the long-distance men who

came to Smithfield. Its very name suggested a sense of security to bearers of the vast sums of gold which changed hands within its walls, a clever bit of psychology which paid off handsomely by its attraction to customers. Ivor and Rhys Morgan were both well known to the landlord and a great welcome always awaited them in its noisy rooms. Every bed had already been taken, and after a good supper they passed the rest of the night in the crowded taproom, drinking heavily and celebrating the end of their long journey, until one by one they gradually went to sleep on the floor.

On the following morning there was little inducement to lie long on the taproom floor as the men woke and picked their way over sleeping companions. Quantities of bread and cheese stood on the sideboard and it was obvious to the bleary-eyed late risers that the food would not remain there indefinitely. The lamps were lit, everyone got up, and talk flowed freely in a medley of accents that the Welshmen found difficult to understand.

Then they all moved off in little groups, big strong hearty men of the countryside, each wearing his enormous overcoat and top hat and carrying a large stick. The early morning scene at the cattle mart transcended everything that had been seen on the previous evening. Every street that opened on to the great market was lined on either side by a variety of horse-drawn vehicles and tethered ponies on which the buyers had come from all parts of the capital. Even at that early hour a suffused roar came to meet the drovers as they emerged on the scene. Beyond the waving sea of tossing horns of the tethered cattle, the jail-like wards and towers of St Bartholomew's Hospital stood, and above the hospital towers, the great grey dome and cross of St Paul's Cathedral seemed to float in the murky sky. The hospital and cathedral

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

made a strangely incongruous backcloth to the savage unreality of the Smithfield Market scene. The men paid little heed to architectural effects, or even anything else beyond their own world of the moment, the successful selling of their stock. Owners quickly took up positions beside their tethered herds, while buyers paced along the rows, scowling indifferently at everything, as they waded ankle deep in liquid manure. Edgar, Ivor and Rhys posted themselves along the line of their Welsh blacks and awaited the buyers' interest. As they stood, the noise of the market increased as fresh crowds came to stand and stare, for Smithfield on a Monday morning was one of the sights of London. At no event in any part of the city was there half the noise as that which came from the roaring and bellowing of the cattle, the sub-human driving screams of drovers, the barking of dogs, dealers swearing and arguing, the ringing of bells, the shouting of hawkers, the smacking of palms as deals were clinched, the incessant whacking of straining bleeding animals, and crowds jostling and shoving to and fro. From all parts of that vast arena of cruelty and human degradation the roaring din of voices came in a long sustained cacophony of noise.

The buying butchers continued their tour of inspection throughout the morning, until they were satisfied that they had found the types of beast that suited their particular trade, when the bargaining started.

The Welsh black cattle were not as big or heavy as most of the English beasts, they were shorter in the leg and more compact in conformation, and none of them had been yarded during the winter, especially fattened in yards on grain and roots for the Easter market. It was obvious that no great thickness of fat surrounded them, but many of the butchers

knew that the smaller Welsh bullocks would pay off a better profit than if bigger money was paid out on fatter and heavier animals. They could guess the weight of each beast that interested them, to within a few pounds.

The Welshmen were well known at Smithfield and many of the same buyers kept on taking the blacks time after time. Ivor and Rhys knew of their popularity, and with the steady rise in prices throughout this great period of expansion, they always asked and obtained higher selling prices on each visit.

One of the buyers clad in an old-fashioned frock coat and top-hat, after feeling the hind quarters of one of the beasts, spoke to Ivor.

'Give you ten guineas apiece for that pair,' he said, indicating two beasts.

'No, indeed, sir,' replied Ivor Morgan. 'I want twelve apiece for 'em.'

The butcher raised a protesting hand and moved away. Ivor allowed him to go, and he continued his inspection. All too soon other buyers stopped and made similar overtures, to be told the same story, and they, too, passed on to price other beasts in the market.

It was obvious from the great number of buyers who explored the lines, that it was a sellers' market, and that once things got really started, business would be brisk. The smacking of open palms grew more frequent as the day wore on. The first butcher who had spoken to Ivor Morgan appeared again and clinched the deal at eleven guineas each, then he took out a small pair of scissors and cut his private mark in the hair of the beasts' rump, and handed over his twenty-two sovereigns. Then his helpers suddenly materialised and the two beasts were led away. So it continued throughout the roaring tumult of the afternoon. The Carmarthenshire herd



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was finally sold off at prices ranging between twelve and nine pounds a beast. The butchers bought in small lots of two, three, or four, and occasionally dealers or farmers would buy lots of six or ten at a time. Cash sales were few and all the butchers took them on credit, arranging to pay at the Lock and Key three weeks later when the carcasses had been sold. The names and addresses of the credit customers were entered up in notebooks to be kept for checking on payment day.

When the last bunch of steers had been sold, a great load of responsibility was lifted and the drovers returned to the Lock and Key to discuss the prices and affairs of the day.

'My God, what a place!' shouted Edgar after draining his first quart of the evening. 'After all the care we've taken of 'em, forcing 'em through snow-storms, floating 'em over the Wye, getting 'em shod, saving 'em from the Hereford coach, and nursing 'em and grazing 'em all the way, to part with 'em in such a place as that, under such conditions and suddenly be left without them, gives a funny feeling, doesn't it?'

The other two looked quizzically at him, with all his mighty bombast their brother was a strange mixture and they could never quite understand him. Their lives had been spent in the cattle trade and they knew little of any other side of life. They knew how to deal ruthlessly with a seller when they were buying, and they knew equally well how to deal with a buyer when they were selling. Their judgment of a beast, its weight, condition, and current value, came as second nature to them, and now that the business was concluded it could be forgotten, and they could enjoy themselves for three weeks until it was time to return home and

#### THE WELSH HERD ARRIVES AT SMITHFIELD

work would begin again. The pattern of their hard life was accepted and often heartily enjoyed, and as soon as one deal was concluded, they would start planning for the next. They certainly entertained none of Edgar's peculiar feelings about it.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### A NIGHT WITH THE LONDON WELSH SOCIETY

ON the following Sunday, the second part of the herd arrived in London in charge of Llewelyn and Dewi with a pair of hired men. The cattle were sold on the Monday in the same way as the first lot, and the five brothers were obliged to remain in the city for the next three weeks until the agreed day of payment came round.

Llewelyn had several commissions to discharge on behalf of Carmarthenshire folk who had business in the city, and were unable to undertake the perilous journey themselves. He brought the rents of two Llandovery estates, which had been collected by the agent, and these were safely delivered to the landlord with all speed. Several other minor commissions were also discharged before the most pleasant and rewarding part of his relationship with his London countrymen took place. This was the delivery of poetry to the literary meeting at the Welsh tavern of Glan y Gors situated near old London Bridge.

This was the social rendezvous of the Society of London Welsh people, the Cymmrodorion, which had been founded

## A NIGHT WITH THE LONDON WELSH SOCIETY

in 1751. Most of the exiles then living in London, had made their way there in the company of drovers on their upward journey and whenever the Welsh drovers returned to the city, the exiled Cymmrodorion members went to Glan y Gors tavern for letters and whatever news of the homeland could be gleaned from the visitors.

Llewelyn, although unskilled in the art of composing the intricate poetic system of combined alliteration and internal rhyme, always considered that his chief commission on visiting London was the delivery of recent Welsh poetry for reading and adjudication by members of the London Welsh Society, together with the entries in the essay competitions which had been set in the previous autumn. His first job after the cattle sale, had been to deliver these literary efforts to Glan y Gors tavern.

The eagerness with which the exiles looked forward to listening to the reading of these effusions from the homeland, was always a source of wonder to the rugged and often illiterate drovers who brought them.

On this occasion, word had been quickly passed round the members that the drovers had come to town with letters from Yr Hên Wlad. The poems and essays had been quickly distributed among the judges, and a day was appointed for their adjudication and recital.

A week had passed and one morning Llewelyn received a message informing him that the Cyfarfod Llenyddol or Literary meeting called the Gyfrinfa would be held at Glan y Gors at 7 o'clock that evening.

'Are you coming to the Gyfrinfa tonight, Edgar?' Llewelyn asked his brother.

'Not I,' was his quick reply. 'That's no place for me, you lot can go, I'll spend an hour or two in Vauxhall

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

Gardens. It'll be more fun there than listening to a lot of poetry.'

'Oh, come on, mun,' replied Dewi, 'it'll be a big change from anything you've seen before, I can tell you.'

'I don't doubt that,' Edgar replied again, 'I tell you I just couldn't stand it, it's all right for these London Welsh that have so little contact with Wales, they love it, and relish hearing poetry about the old country, but I'm not interested. If there was a bit of community singing, now, I'd be with you, but I can't stand this sanctimonious crew who go in for that sort of thing.'

'Look here, Edgar,' said Rhys, 'will you come with us and give it a try, if you don't like it you can easily go out after half an hour, but if you do come, I'll lay you a sovereign that you'll stay and forget about Vauxhall Gardens.'

'Done,' shouted Edgar and held out his hand. They slapped their palms and the wager was clinched.

That same evening found the five men arriving at the long red brick tavern that stood near the northern end of London Bridge. As they approached they heard the notes of a harp float out from an upstairs window, and a crowd of shabby scoundrels stood listening outside on the cobbled pavement. Edgar felt a nudge from Dewi's elbow.

'There you are, mun, what did I tell you? This crowd have been captured by the magic of the harp already and I'll bet that's Trelynnores Gwenffrwd playing.'

'Any women in this party?' queried Edgar. 'If so, I'm not coming in, and you may think this mob is hypnotised by the harp, but for God's sake watch your pockets as you pass 'em. It's a funny thing, but whenever there's a little diversion in this place, you'll always find a crowd of pickpockets hanging round.'

A roar from Edgar made the riverside rabble open out like a flock of pigeons before a stooping falcon, and the five drovers walked in single file into the narrow entrance of the tavern.

Numerous little knick-knacks caught Edgar's eye as they entered, and reminded him of Wales. Engravings of Snowdon, Caernarvon Castle and other familiar features of the homeland, brought on a sudden hiraeth or transient longing. It passed quickly and he was soon presented to some of the assembled company.

He had been quite right in his assumptions of what these exiled Celts would look like. But behind the sombre heaviness, there lay an undercurrent of tense excitement and he sensed the atmosphere of enthusiasm, and responded to it in spite of his prejudice. There was a warmth of welcome and joyous greeting which the drovers had not received since they had left Painscastle.

They were still early, and after introductions had been made, as the members gathered, Edgar was able to piece together the threads of the organisation that lay behind the Gyfrinfa. During the informal talk which preceded the meeting he learnt that it was a friendly society that met regularly to discuss political, social, philosophical, literary or musical problems of the time, regardless of party or sect.

The rules of the Society were simple but definite. There was no settled meeting-place, and the Gyfrinfa moved round among the houses of its members. A new president was elected to preside over each meeting. Every member was obliged to take part at some point in the proceedings, he could only speak from the Gyfrinfa platform and everything was to be conducted in the Welsh language. Drunkenness was forbidden and the payment of a fine of 5s. was exacted

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

for a first offence and 10s. for a second. Sleeping or swearing during meetings was frowned upon, and there was to be no indecent singing or gambling. Members met chiefly for the purpose of promoting literature and encouraging talent and establishing their Welsh nationality amidst the sin and debauchery of the London of their day and to safeguard the best characteristics of the language and Welsh way of life.

Suddenly a hand-bell sounded upstairs and the members ascended to a long room to take their seats on forms and chairs that filled the room. The good-humoured joviality which characterised the welcome given to the drovers downstairs, had changed to a solemn pomposity as befitted the serious occasion.

The president for the night occupied the chair of honour on a little dais at one end of the room. When everyone was seated he rose and the proceedings began with the singing of a hymn composed by Williams Pantycelyn, 'Per Ganiedydd Cymru,' The Sweet Singer of Wales. As the drovers joined in the singing their minds went back to the little farm of Pantycelyn, where the hymn had been composed barely six miles from Cilcwm. They could remember the great man before his death, but the immortal beauty of his great hymns lived on to be sung wherever Welshmen gather. When the strains of the hymn 'Y Llaw Gynhaliol,' which starts, appropriately, 'Cul yw'r llwybyr i mi gerdded,' had died away, the president gave his address of greeting to the assembly; this was supplemented by a poem of welcome to the Cilcwm visitors, given by a prominent bard. Then some music on the harp followed, and some further verses led up to the adjudication and reading of the poetry brought up by Llewelyn. This was the most important part of the evening

and it seemed to Edgar that the audience (many of whom had never seen Wales and were never likely to see it) eagerly absorbed the spirit of the verse, and through the emotional transportation in the message their eyes were opened to the beauty of the country. They saw in imagination the wide hills and little valleys of the poet's vision, and they heard the song of the wind on the high lonely places, and the tinkle of mill streams in the glens, and the singing of birds. Over this Celtic verse, a typical brooding sadness lingered to awaken in the hearers the strange emotionalism of *hiraeth*. Then, with hungry aching hearts, their feelings would finally give way in unashamed tears for the land they loved. They were as an English poet once wrote:

*In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
Brought sad thoughts to the mind.*

It was a moving revelation for the tough and hardy drovers whose livelihood was wrung by toil and hardship, and who had seen so much poverty and misery among the hill-folk who tried to live by agriculture alone. Of the five drovers, only Edgar really knew how the exiles felt. Like many other Welshmen, he had grown up in ignorance of the rich culture of his native land, but long before the memorable experience of that night at Glan y Gors was over, he had become a convert of the Cymnrodorion. Even if he was unable fully to appreciate the subtleties of Cynghanedd, there was a great reward in witnessing the happiness which the delivery of the poetry had brought to its hearers.

When it came to the essay competition, a choice of subjects had been given, ranging from The Effects of Industrial Development on Rural Populations, to a Character Portrait of a Village Personality. The subjects had been set in the



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previous summer and distributed among competitors by the autumn drovers.

The essays which had been selected as the best, were read aloud by separate readers and criticised, then the Gyfrinfa was invited to vote its preference in order of merit. Even with the strict training of nineteenth-century politeness, the members often found it difficult to restrain their emotions, particularly when a judge's criticism failed to agree with their own. At such times their enthusiasm burned visibly behind the outer façade of politeness. The repressive power of Welsh puritanism was often strained to its limit, in order to keep the audience quiet enough to give the adjudicator time to justify his verdict.

Two hours had passed and Edgar had forgotten about the time limit of his wager with Rhys in the enjoyment of listening to the poetic wealth of the untutored writers of Wales.

Within a stone's throw of the Thames, that band of exiled Cymru sat in the ever-thickening atmosphere of pipe smoke, listening in a trance of happiness to verse and prose composed by candlelight in remote hovels in the Welsh hills. Now it was read in the rich and beautiful language of Wales, there in the heart of London.

The Gyfrinfa drew to its close. The president for the next meeting was appointed and installed in his temporary office, and the two presidents changed places on the dais. Then the newcomer thanked the members for their sober demeanour on this great occasion, and urged them to continue to foster the spirit of brotherly love towards all men as befitted the true spirit of London Welshmen: the doxology was sung and the members rose to make their ways home.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE CHALLENGE TO A DUEL

DARKNESS came down over the gloomy streets of London as the brothers were returning to the Lock and Key. Cabs rattled along the cobbled ways, beggars and cripples made continual appeals to the five men for alms, and chip carts, chestnut roasters and barrow boys shouted their selling cries.

'Watch your pockets with this crowd, boys,' warned Llewelyn as the strange denizens of London's night life became more numerous with every murky street they followed.

'Aye, they all look like pickpockets to me,' replied Edgar. 'I wish I had this scum on the parade ground for a spell, I'd knock them into shape.'

In the distance they could hear the roaring of drunken men where a lighted tavern relieved the gloom, and they decided to enter for a drink. The hanging sign that swung above the door displayed a fair representation of a rose and a crown to inform all who could not read (and they formed the great majority) that the inn bore that name.

Inside, the drovers found themselves in a large well-lit

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

room; the floor was covered with sawdust, oil lanterns hung from the blackened ceiling and the air was blue with smoke from a fire and the long clay pipes that were being smoked round the room.

In one corner, a three-legged table surrounded by some empty chairs attracted the newcomers, and they all sat down while Edgar called for drinks to be brought. As the five enormous pewter tankards were placed on the table, and filled from a copper jug, the Welshmen noticed a falling off in the noise, that by a stretch of the imagination might have been called singing. The aproned barman whispered into Edgar's ear.

'You be sittin' at Master 'Arry Lampit's chair, sir, 'e'll cause trouble for you, sir, I'm 'fraid.'

'And who in hell's name is Master Harry Lampit?' asked the drover.

For a moment the barman looked in wonder at his seated customers. 'Then you'm strangers to London gentlemen, if you ain't 'eard of bruiser Lampit.'

'Do these chairs belong to the Rose and Crown or Master Lampit?' asked Edgar. But the frightened bar tender scuttled away. The singing had now ceased altogether and only an excited buzz of conversation filled the room; this, too, began to fade as an ugly-looking customer at the bar put down his drink and sauntered over to the group of strangers seated round the table. By the time he reached the sons of Glan Towy a deathly silence settled over the room, as everyone strained to catch the conversation. Harry Lampit was immaculately dressed at the height of fashion, but his face, nose and ears showed the signs of his trade in no uncertain way; he was obviously a prize-fighter of some standing to judge by the cut of his suit. For a moment he looked down

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at the ruggedly dressed countrymen who were defiling the sanctity of his table, and in spite of his first impression that they were merely a group of yokels, he spoke with an attitude of polite condescension.

'You 'appen to be sittin' in my chairs, gentlemen, me and my friends are wishing to sit down.' He found himself unable to maintain his false mask of politeness any longer as he felt the truculent glare of Edgar's eyes blazing up at him. 'You'll 'op it if yec knows wot's good for yer,' he continued.

Edgar took a long pull at his tankard and crossed his legs comfortably while he calmly surveyed the intruder from head to foot.

'And what if we don't know what's good for us?' he replied.

'Well, I thinks I'll just be showing ye.'

Edgar pretended to look somewhat puzzled.

'Is it your suggestion, sir, that you challenge me to a duel,' he drawled in his most polished Indian army accent. 'If that is so I am perfectly ready to wait upon you with my seconds, at any place and time convenient to you within the next few days.'

The cockney thug was beginning to wonder how much he could take from this mysterious stranger. The dignity attached to the formal ceremony of the duel challenge was a new experience to Harry Lampit. Such things were mostly arranged among the aristocracy and army gentlemen. His vanity was touched, but he was completely at a loss to know what next to say as to the appropriate terminology of the affair. Every ear and eye in the room was bent upon him as he clumsily took off one of his gloves and swiped the inscrutable Edgar across the face with it.

'I challenge you, sir,' he boomed with mock politeness,

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and knowing that the Rose and Crown had neither pistols nor foils, he added, 'you may choose your weapons.'

'I am indeed touched, sir, by your magnanimity in offering me the choice of weapons. But as the range of my choice is perhaps much greater than that of which you have full command, I would be more than grateful if you would do me the honour of choosing your weapons.'

The thinly veiled sarcasm in Edgar's manner, was heightened by the old-world courtesy of his eighteenth-century flamboyance of speech; it smacked of the polished grandeur of the great highwaymen of a previous generation. The aggressiveness of Master Lampit was momentarily checked and Edgar remained seated in his chair, provocatively relaxed. Then, to the astonishment of his brothers, he drew forth a gleaming army pistol from each of the two pockets of his greatcoat, and carefully avoiding the pools of beer, laid them side by side upon the table. Then he pulled out a leather box, opened it, took two bullets and proceeded to load the weapons with such astonishing sleight of hand that no doubts could be left in the minds of anyone as to his devastating skill in their use.

Edgar's cold grey eyes met those of his antagonist.

'You may choose either of these if you wish,' he said calmly, 'or perhaps you would prefer to defend yourself with cold steel,' and as the sentence was completed, he whipped out from a leather scabbard in the lining of his coat, a murderous-looking Gurkha knife, heavy, curved, and deadly in design. Then, with great deliberation, he took a piece of cloth from his secret armoury and proceeded very gently to remove the thin film of oil which covered its immaculate edge and surface.

'This piece is so tempered,' he continued, 'that when

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properly held and delivered it passes straight through the victim's skull, then down through his body, and if accompanied with sufficient force, it emerges between his legs, and the two halves of the man fall apart like a swede split with an axe.'

He was watching the bully's face as he spoke, and as he saw the colour draining from his cheeks he raised his voice.

'Yes, indeed,' roared the Welshman, 'this edge has passed along many a firmer back-bone than anything you are likely to possess.'

He laid the blade beside the pistols. The three weapons shone in the lamplight showing every indication that they were cared for by an artist in their use.

Then Edgar rose to his feet and calmly removed his enormous top-coat, then his long jacket and waistcoat, and deliberately rolled up his thick Welsh flannel sleeves. In the sudden hush which had come over the noisy scene, no man in the tavern would have changed places with either Harry Lampit or the mysterious stranger. This time he had gone too far in his bullying and it was perfectly obvious that he had met his match.

'You may take your choice of my pistols,' Edgar hissed, 'or if you wish to defend yourself with steel I will meet you with my Gurkha blade and you may bring any sword in London to meet me.'

'But perhaps you have no stomach to have your two halves laid side by side to rest in a blood-soaked coffin, aye?' By the time the final 'aye' had been roared out with the full flood of his Celtic fire he had finished rolling up his sleeves and stood ready for the inevitable fistic battle which everyone knew was the only obvious outcome.

Then, without taking his eyes off his adversary's face,

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Edgar asked his brothers to remove the weapons; this was done with alacrity and both Rhys and Ivor felt better with a loaded pistol apiece. The crowd had gradually moved back about the four walls of the room. The three-legged table was removed, and the chairs were spirited away, leaving a clear space in which the two big men faced each other like a pair of game-cocks. Then with quiet methodical deliberation Harry Lampit began to undo the buttons of his jacket. He did not hurry; then just as slowly he took off his coat and let it fall on to the beer-stained sawdust floor. He was a fighter by instinct and there was something about the black-bearded drover that roused insensate animosity within him. The weapon display had shaken him at first, but now that they had been withdrawn and he was faced with a shirt-sleeved opponent, things were back to normal. Edgar noticed the returning composure and knew that he must act quickly, and he struck like a giant cobra. Harry Lampit took the full force of the blow on the mouth before he had been quite ready. The densely packed room saved his reeling figure from contact with the wall, and he was gleefully pushed back by the crowd to receive a left and then a right swing with perfect timing from the balanced drover. Any normal man would have lost all further interest in the world, but Harry Lampit was not finished yet, he covered up and proceeded to defend himself instinctively as his head cleared, and then he settled down to a two-fisted flailing match at the elusive drover as they clinched and jabbed about the space that served them as a ring. For the watchers it was a fascinating spectacle of a contest between a pair of opponents who represented the two extremes of their art, the natural bruiser with the unreasoned instincts of a fighter, against the clear-headed skill of the man who had an answer for every

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move. After about three minutes Edgar suddenly cried a halt. 'That's enough,' he shouted. 'I'll never be able to hit you out, you're too hard, and you'll get nowhere against me, you're too excited.' Harry Lampit paused long enough to hear the strange request and he probably thought his opponent was trying to quit. Edgar read his thoughts in time to recover his defensive attitude and side-step the rush that followed his suggestion. Edgar pivoted like a bullfighter beside the charge, and as his attacker passed him he swung his right fist to the back point of the jaw beneath his ear. He fell face downward at the feet of the yelling crowd and lay still and unconscious. No one was more surprised than Edgar at the strange turn of events. On trying to bring him round it was discovered that Edgar's punch, delivered from its unusual angle, had dislocated Harry Lampit's jaw. It was a great relief to the three drovers when a low moan came from the unfortunate bully to indicate his return to the land of the living; then he was unceremoniously carried out to recover in the fresh air. Foaming tankards of ale were immediately brought for the three Welshmen and the drunken rowdiness of the tavern night-life was resumed. Edgar motioned for the return of the table and chairs, they were speedily produced and the five Welshmen seated themselves again and continued drinking. The four brothers were speechless at first with admiration for their brother's skill, then followed a torrent of questions and congratulations as Edgar pocketed the two still loaded pistols. The Gurkha knife was examined and handled with expressions of awe and wonder by the strangely assorted throng of the tavern, and as the night wore on the account of the knocking out of Harry Lampit as told to newcomers grew ever more terrible in its exaggerated form.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### A PUBLIC EXECUTION

SOME days after the affair over Harry Lampit, Ivor went up to a printed notice that hung on the wall; it proclaimed in big letters: 200 GUINEAS REWARD. 'Listen to this, boys,' he said, and then read aloud:

'Her Majesty the Queen was pleased to promise her most gracious pardon to any of the accomplices of the Highwayman known as BLACK JACK who shall discover him so that he may be apprehended and convicted of the murder or any of the robberies he has committed, as likewise a reward of 200 guineas to any person or persons who shall discover the said criminal so that he may be apprehended and convicted as aforesaid, over and above all other rewards to which they may be entitled.'

The brothers listened as he read.

'Pretty sad light on the times we live in,' said Edgar, 'when our Queen has to offer a reward and pardon to thieves and murderers to turn informer. If I had my way I'd soon sweep the roads of England clear of the scum.'

The landlord came up to the five men, and joined in the conversation.

'It don't matter 'ow many of them notices they print,' he

## A PUBLIC EXECUTION

said. 'The knights of the road, or road inspectors, as they call themselves, never give their pals away. They're a queer lot, these highwaymen, once they takes to the road they becomes quite different to all other mortals.'

'How do you mean?' asked Edgar.

'Oh, I don't know, but they 'aves some special gift of hypnotisin' people to 'and over their purses. You know 'ow it is when a crowd sets off in the coach, all they talks about is whether there'll be a 'old-up and they gets so mortal scared about it, that when the coach stops of a sudden, and a masked face appears at the winder, they'm too frightened to do aught and they 'ands over their cash as quiet as rabbits before a weasel. I've 'eard tell of it so often, and them passengers all armed to the teeth, too. The highwayman gets so confident that 'e don't bother to load 'is pistol 'arf 'is time.'

'D'you mean to tell me that Englishmen pay up regularly like that, without making a fight of it?' asked Edgar, incredulously.

'It's as true as I'm standin' 'ere, sir,' replied the landlord. ' 'ow else d'you think they gets away wiv it for so long? This 'erc Black Jack 'as been on the roads out o' London for eight years for certain; it's a good life while it lasts, I suppose, and once they get started they can't leave off. They're always well dressed in the height o' fashion and so darn polite and genteel, I believe it's part o' their tricks myself, but they gets caught in the end, then it's a crowded trial, a sentence o' death, and then a more crowded execution. This 'erc Black Jack,' and he indicated the reward poster, 'they took 'im some weeks ago out Epping way; he 'ad a fair trial, but tomorrow he climbs the scaffold with the 'angman and the priest. I'm going to see 'im "turned off": you can come if you like.'

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The five men from the Vale of Towy looked at each other. On their many visits to London they had never thought to see a public execution of a highwayman, nor had they known of one taking place. Mutual agreement was soon reached and they decided to go with the landlord.

'Nine o'clock tomorrow morning outside Newgate prison, you'll see 'im strung up,' continued their host relentlessly, 'but you'll 'ave to get there very early 'cause there's going to be a big crowd. Stand wiv yer backs to one of the barriers, then you won't get crushed. Cor, I loves a good 'angin' myself. Aye, they'm bold and desperate fellers, laughin' and jokin' right up to the bitter end in their posh cloths, but it don't 'arf make you feel funny for a bit afterwards, you'll see.' Then he turned away and disappeared about his business.

Later in the day Edgar took a walk along the narrow streets that lay in the direction of Newgate prison. When he came to the open space before the grim grey building he was surprised to find men engaged in putting up heavy oaken barriers round the black scaffold. Several hundred people had already taken up advantageous positions and obviously intended to remain there throughout the night, to be as near as possible to the execution spot. The window of the condemned cell overlooked the scaffold, and Edgar tried to imagine the feelings of the man as he heard the murmur of the crowd as they laughed, joked, sang, and gave occasional cat-calls for the benefit of Black Jack. Speeches, sermons, comic songs and dances amused the ever-growing crowd, sometimes they sang hymns but more often they sang snatches of the more popular songs of the day.

Then, as dusk came down, the drover turned to pick his way back over the filth-strewn cobbled streets to the cheerful warmth of the Lock and Key.

## A PUBLIC EXECUTION

Very early on the following morning, there was a loud banging on the bedroom doors of the inn, and the guests rose and dressed hurriedly in the darkness.

'Come on, gentlemen,' came a shout from the foot of the stairs, 'or we won't be able to get near enough.' In a matter of minutes the six men were striding along through the early morning darkness in the direction of Newgate. When they reached the square in front of the prison, Edgar was amazed to see how much the crowd had grown during the night, and from the ever-growing concourse came a strange rumble of voices that blended into a murmurous sound that swelled, roared, faded, like the movement of waves breaking on a shingle beach.

Gradually the sky lightened, and a beautiful April dawn came over the drab rooftops of Newgate. The drovers found the crowded scene of absorbing interest, there were types and faces that they had never seen before in all their many sojourns in the Capital.

Llewelyn caught the landlord by the arm and asked him about the strange people in the crowd. He laughed, 'On execution morning you sees faces that never appears in the streets at any other time, it's only round the gallows, that's where you ever sees 'em.' Occasionally a fight would break out, sometimes a sermon would be heard, there was laughter and singing and the roar of endless conversation.

By about seven o'clock the crowd had become immense, beyond the space about the gallows a mass of faces stretched away on either side of St Sepulchre's Church, and in many places the packed masses swayed like wind-blown corn.

Occasionally, well-dressed ladies and gentlemen passed along, the crowds opening before them, to their reserved places on tiered seats immediately before the gallows. As

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

each colourful group arrived, it was hissed or boomed or cheered in derision by the rabble.

At last the sheriffs and under-sheriffs arrived at the main gate and the prison governor, surgeon and chaplain came out to receive them. Then they disappeared within and the great gate closed behind them.

From that moment the crowd became ever more silent as faces were turned expectantly towards the tiny window where Black Jack, accompanied all the time by a chaplain, awaited his fateful moment. Gradually other city dignitaries assembled at their places round the scaffold to await the stroke of nine o'clock.

The first note of the prison bell began to boom the long awaited moment. Then a small door immediately opposite the gallows opened, and a priest came out, followed by the tall magnificently dressed figure of the highwayman, his arms strapped firmly behind his back. The hangman and four jailers followed behind. As the macabre procession walked to the foot of the scaffold, the tolling of St Sepulchre's Church bell joined in with the prison bell and a long hungry roar went up from the multitude, amidst cries of 'hats off, hats off.' Then the crowd paid its homage, standing bare-headed, to the hero of the moment, and the sea of white faces made a ghastly spectacle in the spring morning sunlight.

The priest mounted the steps to the top of the scaffold, followed by Black Jack, and in spite of the handicap of his bindings and the fact that he climbed to death, he achieved the difficult ordeal with greater firmness and precision than the priest; the hangman followed and the jailers waited below. Three figures now stood on the centre of the platform, the priest and highwayman conversing together while the hangman stood slightly apart. The pressure of the crowd

## A PUBLIC EXECUTION

about the barrier increased as the masses squeezed nearer, women began to scream and faint. Gradually the roaring and cheering died away and the strange silence was broken only by the steady tolling of the two bells. When the priest had finished his ministration, Black Jack turned towards the crowd, his face was as white as marble, and an April breeze moved a lock of his hair as he smiled and bowed to his audience. A triumphant roar of applause burst forth again in obvious recognition and fierce enjoyment of his courage. Then the hangman advanced and placed a black hood over his victim's head, the noose was lowered and adjusted about his neck as he stood on the hinged platform of death. Then the big bolt was drawn and the drop fell with a loud boom.

As Black Jack fell, a strange sound welled up from the multitude, a mingled blend of human emotion that has no definition. As it gradually subsided, the solemn tolling of the bells was heard again on the morning wind, the crowds began to disperse, and the pressure on the barrier gradually eased away.

The four brawny drovers made their way from the scene of the execution in silence until Dewi mumbled something about it being 'a pity for the poor devil, too.' Edgar grunted his scorn of the statement but did not indulge in further conversation until Dewi, being a rather kind-hearted man, piped up with the statement, 'such a fine figure of a man, so brave, too.'

'Pa!' grunted Edgar. 'You lads take no thought of the innocent travellers that the swine murdered in cold blood because they had the courage to oppose his demands.'

'No, Dewi boy, don't you worry your head about rogues and villains like Black Jack; why, when I was in India——' Then followed a lengthy sermon on the ways in which he

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had seen better men killed and left for the vultures to devour.

'He's right, mun,' said Llewcllyn when his brother had concluded, 'no one knows the terrible things that that man must have done in his time. Why, you could see he's been hard at work by his fine suit. I'm sorry now that I took my hat off for the man, old Edgar never took his hat off!'

'Oh, I suppose so, Llew,' said Ivor, 'but you can say what you like, he died like a gentleman.'

By this time they had reached the hall of the Lock and Kcy, and the subject of the morning's entertainment was abandoned, and after they had thrown off their heavy coats they adjourned to the bar where breakfast awaited them.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE ROAD HOME

THREE weeks passed quickly and then came the appointed day of payment for the first drove of cattle. A small room behind the bar of the Lock and Key was prepared as an office. Edgar insisted on decking the room out as nearly as possible on the lines of an army pay office with a long table over which a blanket was ceremoniously draped. On the far side of the table facing the door three chairs were placed, and a large money box lent by the landlord, together with the precious notebook, quill pen, and pewter inkstand, lay on the table.

The first butcher arrived and was shown into the little room, where Edgar, Llewelyn, and Ivor received him. James Turner of Finchley was the name, two bullocks, twenty-two sovereigns. The twenty-two gold coins were counted by Ivor and put into the box, while Edgar found the name and address in his notebook and crossed it off, and Llewelyn wrote out a receipt and handed it to the butcher. In the bar he was entertained by Rhys and Dewi to the drink of his choice; then the next customer arrived, and so it continued throughout the morning. Butchers, farmers



## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

and dealers arrived at the tavern on horseback, or driving a trap, float, dog-cart and a variety of horse-drawn vehicles.

The Lock and Key did a roaring trade, for hardly any of the farmers or dealers stopped at the first drink bought by the drovers, many of them spent the morning there. By mid-day the last customer's name had been crossed off the book, his receipt given, and the money box contained a sum of nearly two thousand pounds to the credit of the handlers of the first drove.

The horses had been saddled and brought round to a side-door, the money box was put into a stout canvas bag for delivery to the bank for temporary safety. Edgar loaded his two pistols and they all quietly left the tavern. Once in the saddle they breathed more freely. During their stay in the district the five distinguished-looking brothers had often been the subject of searching glances from the doubtful characters who inhabited that grim corner of London. The pay date had become known in the district, which teemed with rogues of every description, many of whom would gladly commit murder for a small sum. The phenomenal growth of London during the early part of the industrial era, had attracted an army of jailbirds and fugitives, though it would have needed a very stout-hearted band of robbers to contemplate an attack on the five determined-looking horsemen as they rode in rhythmic unison along the cobbled streets. But Edgar's fertile imagination had conceived several ways in which a surprise hold-up could have been staged by an experienced gang and he intended to take no chances with their golden haul.

It was barely half a mile to the banking chambers of the firm which Llewelyn Morgan used when in London, and it

was a great relief when the money had been checked and put away in safety.

It was decided that they would all remain in London until payment for the second drove had been completed and then they could return home to Wales together in a posse of strength.

They dismounted at the first tavern they came to and went in to celebrate the completion of the first part of the big deal.

'How do we stand over the profits on this trip, Llew?' asked Ivor.

Llewelyn was the family accountant who held the purse strings and liked to keep the family finances to himself as far as possible. But when confronted by a definite question on a statement of accounts, by one of the 'shareholders,' he reluctantly relinquished the information.

'Oh, not so bad, mun, considering,' was the reply which, when judged by Llewelyn's usual understatements, meant that a handsome profit had been made. They were not to be denied the full statement of accounts, however, and he was pressed for further details.

'Well, they made tidy prices up here, this time,' he admitted. 'What did we give for them down home, about £5 apiece, wasn't it, and they fetched round about £10 a beast to London butchers, some more, and some less, of course, but I've counted it out, and we've almost doubled the cost of the cattle. The four hundred cost us £2,000 and they sold for £4,000. But mind you,' he added quickly, 'there's a lot of expenses to come out of that, aye, indeed, I've counted it all up, ferrying, shoeing, grazing at night on the way up, bed and board for the nine of us on the whole trip, and the toll-gates between Willersly and Smithfield,

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

that's what takes the cream off it. Jiawch erioed, it's hardly worth the bother.'

A substantial margin of profit still remained over and above the total expenditure. But with the true instincts of the farmer dealer within him, Llewelyn looked upon their necessary expenses with a heavy heart, particularly the money exacted from them by the toll-gate keepers.

They remained in London for another week until the appointed day for payment of the second drove. The morning's business was conducted with the same dignity as of the previous week, and the money was banked with the same armed escort as before.

That night they were treated to a rousing farewell party by the tavern regulars, and the more hilarious they grew, the more worried Edgar became over the fact that their intended departure on the following day was obviously well known to every highwayman's tout in the East End of London. After brooding over this thought for a while, he suddenly got to his feet, and pretending to be far more drunk than he was, raised his tankard on high and roared for silence. Then he asked his many friends to rise and drink a toast.

'Stand up and drink a toast with me, lads, a toast to lil 'ole Wales where we go tomorrow, and the good old Worcester road that'll take us there. A toast I say, a toast to Wales and the Worcester road, ahoy!'

The revellers rose to a man and roared out the toast to Wales and the Worcester road. Other toasts were called for, and the apparently well-oiled Edgar roared in support of them all. But inwardly he chuckled to himself at the thought that he would probably be sending some highwayman's tout off on an all-night ride down the Worcester mail coach road to inform his chief to await the coming of the five

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black-bearded drovers. Actually, they would leave London by the Bath road and gradually work up by side roads towards Gloucester.

On the following morning they bade farewell to the landlord of the Lock and Key and reached the bank as it opened. The money was counted out into lots of four hundred sovereigns in each bag. The drovers took two bags each, pocketed them and rode away up the Holburn and into Oxford Street. Horse-drawn vehicles of all types clattered over the granite cobbles, the busy morning life of the City poured in to meet them; at that hour of the day very little traffic moved westward and the five men on their big horses made a conspicuous bunch as they trotted steadily on.

When they came to the Tyburn turnpike gate (where Marble Arch now stands) they paid toll and passed out on to the Worcester road. After about half a mile Edgar cried a halt, and invited the party into one of the coffee houses that lay on the route. When they were seated round the table he explained his precautionary measure of the previous night and the grim certainty that if they continued along the Worcester road, they would run into a well-planned ambush. The trip along the Worcester road so far had been merely a blind in case one of the touts had been following.

'Now back to Tyburn gate with us,' he concluded, 'and then we'll separate and go down the Bath road from Hyde Park Corner one at a time and meet at the fourth milestone, in case there's a tout watching there as well.'

The brothers readily acknowledged the wisdom of the plan, for the cash they carried was a heavy responsibility. They left the coffee house one at a time and rode back through the Tyburn Gate, and round to the Piccadilly Turnpike at Hyde Park Corner.

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Edgar was the last to leave and he cantered back along the route and followed his brothers to the other side of the park to start the journey westward along the prearranged way towards Kensington.

After the Watch House and Weighing House that stood opposite each other, there was a long succession of inns, taverns and coffee houses on either side of the way, with a garish assortment of inn signs hanging in front of them. Cannon Brewery stood where the Albert gate now stands, and the horse-barracks stood opposite the foot-barracks. Glazed oil lamps had been put up for some distance as this particular stretch had once been a profitable haunt of foot-pads after dark. Bells were rung at regular intervals at night at Hyde Park Gate and the Kensington ends to gather walkers together for mutual protection when travelling along this dreaded stretch. But on the sunlit April morning as Edgar cantered along, it seemed innocent enough as the busy horse-drawn traffic poured in towards the City. The great London homes of the aristocracy began to take the place of the taverns on his left. Rutland House, Kent House, Kingston House, Gore House and many others peeped above their high walls. On his right, the forbidden demesne of Hyde Park lay behind its long brick wall.

At the end of the Park he entered the Kensington stretch, lined again on either side by a great variety of taverns, butchers' shops, beer-houses, saddlers, blacksmiths, green-grocers, gaming-houses and a wide variety of inn signs. In front of Kensington Church the stocks stood in position.

It was a busy village of congested traffic with stage-coaches, post-chaises, horsemen of all types, travelling gigs, market carts, drays of beer barrels, gambos of hay or corn, herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, all going into the City

with a deafening rattle of noise heightened by iron-rimmed wheels rattling on the cobbles.

At Kensington Turnpike he paid his sixpence and continued on to pass Holland House. Gradually the congested roadside taverns grew further apart. Market gardening took precedence as he came to the Counter's Bridge across the Stamford Brook and so he continued to Hammersmith and another turnpike. Great houses appeared along the way, Broadmore House and Paddingwick House and the great Cromwell Brewery with its familiar smell.

Up on Starch Green, three gibbets cut the skyline beyond the rooftops, with human figures dangling in chains from each one. Edgar wondered to himself if Black Jack was one of them, for the highwayman whom he had seen executed at Newgate would certainly be carted back to the exhibition gibbet nearest to the scene of his crimes.

He finally caught up with his four brothers and they all rode steadily on towards the west. Beyond the village of Hounslow, they came to a division of the ways, the Exeter Mail Coach road lay to the left, and they continued across the lonely heath by the road to Bath. Buildings had disappeared completely and they were once again in the empty countryside to which they were so accustomed. The cobbled roads had given out and the horses moved with greater freedom and speed on the soft going at the edge of the rutted carriageways. There were no hedges, and riders had moved ever further on to the side of the road, thus widening it considerably. The five horses responded happily to the challenge of the hoof-cut turf after their long-stabled idleness. The spring air was fresh and keen and they knew with the unfathomable instinct of animals, that they were heading for home. The riders felt the rising spirits of their long-

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

checked mounts and let them have their heads, and for several miles they rose and fell in the saddles as the homing horses set the turf sods flying with a thundering tattoo of pounding hooves. The drovers held their seats with the confident ease that came from a lifetime spent in the saddle, as the long road over the greening heath flew beneath them, and a chorus of bird-song filled the air as they travelled on towards Wales.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE 'HAND OF GLORY'

EDGAR was feeling disappointed that they had not encountered a highwayman as they cantered over the lonely Hounslow Heath, though he was discreet enough to withhold his thoughts from his brothers. The sum of money which they carried was too great a responsibility to be treated so lightly, and he knew that his wish to encounter a 'gentleman of the road' would not be shared by the others.

The five horses had settled down to an easy second wind, and were enjoying the gallop as much as their riders, when, without warning, a lone rider swung out of a thicket that edged the road. There could be no mistaking his profession, he was masked, and armed with a jewelled pistol which he held in his right hand, while he controlled his well-trained mount with the left. With confident ease he swung his horse across the path of the oncoming riders, and sat poised and smiling with his pistol pointing skywards. There was something about his sudden appearance, and the natural easy positioning of the horse, that hypnotised the riders into checking and pulling up their mounts like five obedient schoolboys at a word from their master.



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'Good afternoon, gentlemen,' he began, 'what is the cause of your haste?' His speech contained a note of confiding politeness that was obviously calculated to put his victims at their ease. He continued to smile as he looked the drovers over, and observed with a flash of understanding that four of them had shot hasty glances at one of their number. The brothers had indeed all taken a quick look at Edgar to see his reaction to this sudden encounter. The highwayman immediately deduced that he was the one who carried the money.

It was Llewelyn who first spoke.

'We are only hoping to reach home in time for tea, sir,' he replied.

The highwayman laughed aloud, 'And by your accent, my fine Welsh friend, it'll take you much longer than that. No, sir, as well-laden a band of crafty Welsh drovers as ever carried their gold over Hounslow Heath, I'll be bound. I hope you sold your cattle well, and if you ever want to see your native land again you'll hand over your sovereign bags with all speed. Come quickly, damme, I have little time to waste, which of you is exchequer? for me thinks you're all of one family.'

There was something about the man's bewitching charm of manner which lulled his audience into a subconscious willingness to part with a bag or two of sovereigns if they could only be permitted to carry on with their journey. But in Edgar's mind there was no trace of willingness to part with anything to the soft-spoken mountebank who dangled his pistol before him. In his mind there burnt one thought only, how to overcome the pistol that was flaunted in his face. He watched the gun hand with the eyes of a goshawk, and noticed that the hammer was cocked, but it was also

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obvious to him that there was no great skill behind the grip. Then apparently addressing the highwayman, he spoke in Welsh.

'Gwrandewch frodyr, 'rwyn mynd i fewn. Os tana cf ei ddryll, bydd y ddryll wedyn y wag. Gobeithio cewch afal arno, a'i ladd.'

The message had been given as though he was speaking directly to the highwayman who obviously did not understand a word, which was lucky for Edgar.

'Listen to me, brothers,' he said, 'I am going in. If he fires his gun at me, it will then be empty. I hope that you'll get him and kill him.'

He accompanied his little speech with an air of such genuine terror that the highwayman accepted the fact that in the extremity of his fright he had reverted to his mother tongue. Edgar drew the bag of gold from his right-hand pocket and held it out for the highwayman to come and fetch.

'Bring it here,' commanded the masked man, 'and you four remain where you are.'

Edgar demurred for a moment, to give the impression that he did not understand English. The highwayman's hand signals were clear enough as he called him on and Edgar urged his horse up to the gunman and handed over the bag. He felt its contents through the canvas and pocketed it with satisfaction.

'Now I'll trouble you for the other bag,' he demanded, guessing that a sum of such a weight would only be the one half which would be counterbalanced by the other half in the other pocket. The Welshman appeared to be a broken-hearted man as he drew forth the second bag and handed it over.

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

'Over a thousand pounds you take off us, the price of the whole herd it is,' said Edgar, 'what will my master say now. Oh, please to put a bullet through my hat to show that we made a bit of a fight,' and so saying he held his hat up for the highwayman's bullet. It was a tempting target, and after taking careful aim he fired, cutting a neat hole in the hat.

It had been hard work for Edgar to maintain the pose of a cowardly monoglot Welsh farm servant before this cocky parasite of the highway, but the pistol was now empty and just as the highwayman wheeled his horse away he heard the blood-curdling battle yell of the cavalry officer behind him. The two horses felt the heels of their riders simultaneously dug into their sides, and they shot away with barely a length between them. For several seconds, the thunder of hoof-beats echoed over the lonely heath as the leading horseman raced away and the gap that lay between Edgar and his following brothers widened steadily.

'Shoot 'im, Edgar, shoot 'im,' came the frantic calls from behind, but the old cavalry leader had other plans for the man who fled before him. They were both well mounted, but the highwayman's horse was slowly but surely overhauled by the long-legged animal that closed in on its left. Then Edgar drew his Gurkha blade from its sheath as he closed within reach of his victim, and raising it high, brought it down on the bent back before him with such force that it severed the highwayman's spine and he slumped and fell into the roadway beside his fleeing horse.

By the time the other four came galloping up they found their brother bending over the prostrate form, cleaning his heavy blade on the slashed coat of his victim with as little concern as a falcon cleans its beak on the plumage of its prey. He bent down and drew out his two bags of money from

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the pockets of the blood-soaked coat together with the empty gun.

They stood in shocked silence as he straightened up, pocketed the two bags, and sheathed his blade in its scabbard in the lining of his coat.

'That's one less on the roads of England,' was his terse comment. 'We'll report this at the next town and they can come out and do what they like with him,' he concluded. 'Get hold of his horse, Dewi, and let's go, I'm thirsty.'

They remounted without further comment, and leading the saddled horse cantered away until they came to the Thames-side village of Maidenhead, and the stable-yard of the Rose and Crown.

'We'll have to put up here for the night, until I've reported this business to the local magistrate,' said Edgar, and the six horses were left in charge of the stable boys with orders to give them a good rub down, warm bedding, and a feed.

They stumped into the bar and Edgar roared for the landlord; when Edgar roared for a landlord, that worthy dropped everything and came running.

'Five quarts of your best and look lively about it,' he commanded, as mine host of the Rose and Crown appeared in answer to the summons. 'Supper and beds for the five of us, and the name and address of the local magistrate,' he added, 'I've just slaughtered one of your highwaymen and I suppose the authorities will want the carrion moved off the highway.'

Whatever mugs of ale were moving in the ascendant direction at the time, never reached their destinations, they were quickly returned to the table and every eye in the bar was turned in the speaker's direction.

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

'How did it happen, sir?' asked the landlord in shocked surprise, and every ear was strained for the reply.

'Oh, he just held us up at pistol point, then took a small purse of money off me and turned to go, and I split his back open with this' and he laid his big blade on the counter, before the frightened gaze of the landlord.

'Oh my Gawd,' he ejaculated, shooting a quick glance round the room. He was about to comment further on the matter and then appeared to dry up completely and stand speechless before the five grim-looking giants.

Whatever craft or guile lay behind Edgar's motives was well hidden by his swashbuckling bragadoccio. He always believed in taking the bull by the horns, acting first and asking questions afterwards. His sudden dramatic introduction to the landlord had been done with the express purpose of observing his reactions under the stimulus of his shock trick. He had already learned what he had suspected, that the highwayman had friends in the district, who were either in league with the landlord or else they terrified him. One thing was certain, the Hounslow Heath operator had allies, and reprisals were to be expected.

When the landlord had got over his surprise, he stammered out the address of the Mayor who was also the Justice of the Peace in that part of the valley.

'It's his worship Mr Terence Runciman you'd be wishing to see, sir, he lives at Thames Arbour 'bout arf a mile down the road, sir; you'll easy reccernise it, sir, with the big green doors for the coach-'ouse, sir.'

'Thank you, landlord,' replied Edgar. 'We'll walk down and see him in about twenty minutes, a little walk'll do us good after riding all day.'

'What 'ave ye done with the horse, sir?' asked the landlord.

### THE 'HAND OF GLORY'

'Put him in your stable with our own,' was Edgar's loud reply.

Then he spoke in Welsh to his brothers.

'Don't use a word of English, make out that you can only speak in Welsh, and listen to what's said, look quite daft, it shouldn't be difficult for you,' he added with a grin. 'I'm going out for a minute.'

He turned to the landlord and explained.

'My friends have no English, so don't expect too much out of them.'

He went outside and explored the stables where the horses had been stalled; all six were quietly munching from the manger. He discovered a back-door and left by a route that brought him round to the main road again, when he re-entered the bar and joined in the Welsh conversation of his brothers. The lack of interest taken in the death of the highwayman was very puzzling.

After drinking their fill they decided to visit the Justice of the Peace and Edgar explained to the landlord that they would return to supper.

After proceeding a short distance along the road, Edgar told the other four to carry on quietly and he would catch them up at the Mayor's house. With that he turned into the little alley which brought him back to the rear of the stables. He re-entered and concealed himself behind some corn bins. He was barely settled when he heard voices approaching the stable door. Then two men entered and inspected the horses; they quickly picked out the highwayman's horse and examined it furtively. They spoke in whispers and Edgar tried hard to catch their words. But all he could pick up was the name Dick, and something about the hand of glory. When they emerged from the stall, he recognised them as

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

being two of the men from the Tavern bar and as evil a pair of rascals as any that he had seen at Smithfield.

Some minutes later he slipped out of his hiding-place, returned to the main road and caught his brothers up as they came to the house with the big green doors.

They walked up to the front porch, rang the bell, and were shown into a waiting-room where the Maidenhead magistrate received them with great civility. After the small talk which habitually accompanied such formal introductions, Edgar went straight to the point.

'We were riding over Hounslow Heath this afternoon, sir, on our way home to Wales after doing business in London, when we were accosted by a masked man on horse-back who held us up at pistol point. Under the threat of being shot, we handed some money to him; he was about to go, when I begged him to fire at my hat which I held aloft in this way,' and he accompanied his words with the raising of his hat. 'So that we could have proof of having fought him. Much to my surprise he was fool enough to fall for the trick and emptied his gun at the hat.' Then he displayed the hole drilled by the gunman's bullet. 'Then I chased him and caught him, and cut him down with a heavy blade which I brought back from service in the Indian army. He was dead by the time I dismounted to get my money back.'

The magistrate's face had quickly lost its joviality when his visitor mentioned the hold-up, but as the tale progressed to its gory conclusion, his relief was obvious.

'My dear sir,' he began, 'you have indeed done us a service, how can I thank you, there's no doubt it was Dick Hounslow, he's one of, *was* one, I mean, of the biggest offenders against the coach traffic in this part of the valley.

### THE 'HAND OF GLORY'

He's been a wanted man for over eighteen months. In his middle-twenties, you say? yes, that's about it. They get away with this sort of thing for a time, but sooner or later retribution catches up with them. I'll send a cart out for his body first thing in the morning, and we'll have him strung up on the gibbet just beyond the bridge for any of his pals to see. If you could give me a written report on the matter in the morning I will be most grateful.'

Edgar was glad that there were to be no long-drawn-out formalities and that they would be free to continue on the morrow after he had written out a detailed report which the magistrate required.

'There's one final point I'd like to ask you about, sir, before we go. What is meant by the Hand of Glory?'

The colour drained away from the magistrate's face and a look of horror came into it.

'Where have you heard about that, my boy?' he asked in a changed voice.

'Oh, it was mentioned in London recently and I had no time to find out about it, and the thing intrigues me,' he replied.

The magistrate's composure was visibly affected by the question.

'I'd prefer not to discuss the awful thing,' he began, 'but as you're strangers and have done us a great service, I may as well tell you about it. Let me make up the fire first.' Then he put some fresh logs on the dying embers, and the men brought their chairs round in a semi-circle while their host poured out six glasses of port wine and settled himself for his story.

'Of course, I must tell you at the outset that I don't believe in the power of the "Hand of Glory" myself, to me it's all





*The 'Hand of Glory'*

superstitious nonsense, though when I was a small boy, it made a terrible impression on me; in the eighteenth century we believed all sorts of rubbish. However, it seems that the power of the charmed hand goes back to the days of medieval Germany. The criminals of old were a superstitious crowd and they had great faith in any sort of black magic that would help them in their evil work; there were all sorts of spells used, but probably the most horrible of all was the "Hand of Glory." You see, whenever a group of thieves intended to enter a house to steal at night, their greatest fear was that the people of the house would wake up, so in order to make sure that they stayed asleep they took with them this dreaded "Hand of Glory."

The magistrate drained his glass of port before going on with the story. Then he continued:

"The "Hand" was actually a human hand cut off the corpse of a murderer; there were plenty of them about in those days, they dangled in irons from gibbets every few miles along the roads. Then wicks were fastened to each finger of the hand and these wicks had to be made from locks of human hair taken from the head of the corpse and saturated with grease from his body. When these wicks were lighted they burned with a horrible bluish flame. The hand was then

### THE 'HAND OF GLORY'

carried into the house. Now, the strange part of the story is this, that these fellows believed that everyone who was already asleep in that house, would remain in a deep sleep from which they could not wake until the lights of the "Hand of Glory" went out, so the robbers could search the place with impunity.'

The five drovers sitting before the glowing fire listened in silence as their host's voice went on with his tale. Four of them were already spellbound through their strong Celtic imaginations; even Edgar shuffled uneasily in his chair, took a draught of porter and found his voice.

'Good God, sir, surely the damn fools didn't actually think the charm would work?'

'They were completely convinced of it,' replied the magistrate. 'I can clearly remember fifty years ago, we'd often see a gallows victim minus its right hand.'

A silence fell upon the six men, as the last part of the story sank in, then the story teller's voice went on again as he quoted some lines from the Ingoldsby Legends:

*'On the lone bleak moor, at the midnight hour  
Beneath the Gallows Tree,  
Hand in hand the murderers stand,  
By one by two by three!'*

*'Now mount who list, And close by the wrist,  
Sever me quickly the dead man's fist  
Now climb who dare, where he swings in air,  
And pluck me five locks of the dead man's hair.'*

Another silence followed the reciting of the lines, then he continued:

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*'Wherever that terrible light shall burn,  
Vainly the sleeper may toss and turn;  
His leaden lids shall he ne'er uncloze  
So long as that magic taper glows.  
Life and treasure shall he command,  
Who knoweth the charm of the Glorious Hand!'*

'All stuff and nonsense,' retorted Edgar, 'I simply can't believe it; anyway, why the devil don't they bury the damned sinners after hanging them? I should have thought that taking a man's life away from him for a crime, was quite enough. Why befoul the countryside with all these gibbets afterwards? They're inviting this damned nonsense of the "Hand of Glory" by leaving the corpses in full view.'

'That may be so,' replied the magistrate, 'but after gibbeting was introduced in 1753 the attacks on mail coaches certainly became fewer. It certainly proved to be a strong deterrent because these chaps don't mind risking a hanging, but they certainly don't relish the idea of this lengthy post-mortem indignity afterwards, and it has cut down a great deal of crime. I'll tell you of an experience I had to prove it. I can clearly remember one night long ago when I was young, coming back over the hill by Inchfield Down after seeing a lass home, 'twas well after midnight and a full moon shining in the sky, the wind was blowing something dreadful and I could hear the gibbet irons clanging on Inchfield gibbet as it swung in the wind with the body of Palmer Ned in the cage. He'd been up there for about two months and believe me the wind and rain hadn't improved him, I can tell you. His right hand had been cut off, his hair was nearly all gone, and the crows had been at 'im. Well, I don't mind admitting I didn't relish passing that spot, but I could hear the hoof-

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beats of a rider coming up the hill road that joins the main coach road at that point and of course I thought it was a highwayman, so I jumped into the bushes by the gibbet and waited for 'im to pass. The Bristol mail coach was about due and I thought, now for it. That horseman was masked all right and 'e came straight up to the gibbet and looked at old Ned, the moonlight was full on his face as he looked, and although he was masked I'll never forget the look on that man's face. Then suddenly, here comes the sound of the mail coach in the distance, but the gallant "road inspector" (as they call themselves) suddenly turned his horse round and galloped back the way he'd come and I wasn't long in leaving Ned's company, either. But I'm convinced to this day that old Ned Palmer's stinking body saved the mail that night. Yes, there's precious little mercy shown to a man who once takes to the High Toby trade, I can tell you. If you hold up a coach, it's a capital offence and death by hanging follows automatically and feeling runs so high against them, that they get hoisted into these gibbets and left to dangle as a warning to others who may be tempted to "speak with the mail" as they call it. I know for a fact that highwaymen don't relish the prospect of being left to decay in public and I'm convinced that it's a good thing.'

'But what about the relatives of the man,' put in Llewelyn, 'it's sure to be a bad thing for them; think of his wife or his mother and father.'

'Ah, yes, I agree with you,' replied the story-teller, 'it must be a terrible thing for a mother, I remember one story of a lad who set out to hold up the stage coach; it was supposed to be only a youthful prank, but he took the mail. He was caught shortly afterwards and hanged for it, and gibbeted within sight of the cottage where his mother lived, and when

## THE DROVERS' HIGHWAY

the bones fell from his rotting body, that mother collected every single one until she had gathered up the complete skeleton, and had it decently buried.'

He rounded off his tale by recharging the glasses of his visitors. They had listened in grim silence to the tales and it was Llewelyn who spoke.

'Nefocdd y byd, it's glad I'll be when we get back to Wales again from by here; I suppose it's all these rich folk travelling about with their money between London and the other big cities that tempts these men to hold up the coaches.'

'That's the main cause of it all,' replied the magistrate, 'the rich continue to visit Bath for their holidays and many of them take so much money with them that these scoundrels are tempted to risk their necks to relieve them of some of it. But this century's not so bad as the last one,' he continued, 'times aren't so good for the highwaymen now, people are using the banks more and payments are being made by cheque. Pitt's Act for restricting cash payments has cut down the carrying of big sums of money. In the old days it was nothing for people to carry several thousand pounds in gold on them after a big deal, the silly fools wouldn't trust the banks and they only had themselves to blame when they were robbed, but they are getting more sensible now. Bank-notes are taking the place of gold coin and it's a good thing; numbered notes are dangerous currency for thieves to handle, people are learning to trust the banks nowadays.'

Each of the five drovers suddenly felt the weight of the golden sovereigns that he carried in his pockets, reminding him of his heavy responsibility. Then, as though reading their thoughts, the host advised them to ride as far as they could on the following day and get home safely. With that they took their leave, and returned in the darkness to the

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tavern of the Rose and Crown. On the way, Edgar purposely withheld the account of his visit to the stable where he had overheard the reference to the 'Hand of Glory' and the quick recognition of Dick's horse by the two visitors. He knew there would be four voices to one in favour of riding on through the night. As they entered the inn he reminded them:

'Don't forget now, you four can only talk Welsh, I'm going round to get that stable locked up, keep your cars open when you get inside, I've got my reasons.'

To his relief he saw that the stable had already been locked up, and on returning to the noisy bar found his four brothers drowning the effects of their gruesome entertainment at the magistrate's house, with the usual quart tankards of foaming ale. There was one ready for him, but he confessed to a complete absence of thirst and refused to touch it. A quick look round the room assured him that the two men who had visited the stable were absent. He cracked many jokes with the landlord about his four stupid friends who could not understand English, and they were obliged to bite their tongues in order to keep back the laughter as they heard and understood everything he said. Then, before the effects of the drink loosened their tongues too much, they all retired for the night.

The large bedroom contained two double beds, and it was agreed that they should sleep two in a bed while one stayed awake on duty to guard the money, as Edgar said jokingly, 'in case the "Hand of Glory" came in.' They readily agreed, and he volunteered to keep watch for the first hour when he would then wake one of the others to relieve him.

In spite of all the happenings of that first day out of

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London, Edgar felt certain that there was still more to come. Each man spread his overcoat containing the money on the bed, lay on top of it, and pulled the bedclothes over. Very soon a chorus of mighty snoring rose and fell in rhythm with the rising and falling of the blankets that covered the recumbent forms.

Edgar made a careful examination of the room by the light of his candle and finally seated himself on a wicker chair from where he could command a good view of the door. He carefully primed and loaded his brace of pistols, cocked them, and laid them close at hand; with that, he blew out his candle and settled back in the darkness for his long vigil.

Gradually the roistering below grew less, as one group after another took its noisy departure and went bawling and shouting into the distance, the doors were closed, and silence settled over the jaded atmosphere of the old tavern.

The first hour passed quickly and the watcher in the darkness made no move to awaken any of his brothers to take a turn of guard duty. He felt that only he was equal to the task which lay ahead and as he had kept his suspicions to himself, he could not expect any of his brothers to be fully trusted to stay awake. He got up and went to the window to watch and listen, but the night was very dark and only the sound of the wind in the trees and the occasional twittering of Thames rats could be heard. He returned to his chair and waited until the church clock struck the hour of two. By that time his suspicions of an intended robbery were disappearing, perhaps his loud boasting in the bar and the display of the Gurkha knife had been enough to dissuade any potential thieves, perhaps he was only wasting precious time from sleep, and the deep breathing of his four kinsmen

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acted like a soporific call to slumber that grew harder to resist with each quarter stroke on the church clock. His visits to the window to watch and listen grew more frequent in his anxiety to keep awake, on several occasions he nearly dozed off and only managed to pull himself together each time. Finally he became afraid to sit in the chair any longer for fear of sleeping, and was about to yield to the temptation of awakening one of his brothers to take over when he noticed a pale line of light beneath the door. Edgar's hands closed over the brace of pistols in the darkness and he waited in deadly tension for what seemed like an age, and all the while the snoring in the room went on and on. In a state of rigid tension he watched the light beneath the door increase in brightness.

Then, suddenly, a line of light shot up at right-angles to the floor line, the door was slowly opening. The visitor was obviously taking no chances. Very slowly the line of light widened, until Edgar saw the face of a man illumined by five points of blue light glowing from the finger-tips of a withered hand held in the hand of the thief. The 'Hand of Glory' had arrived, and even to Edgar Morgan, in whom the normal sense of fear had been obliterated long ago, the spectacle of that grizzly human torch, casting its ghostly glow about the ugly features of its bearer, sent a cold spasm of terror over him. His plan had been to allow the thieves to enter, begin their search, then give them the biggest rough-and-tumble of their lives, but he had not realised the effect of the 'Hand' on those who see it lit in all its terror for the first time. His hands tightened in a spasm of sudden fear and the pistol he was holding went off with a tremendous roar in that confined space and the thief collapsed in the doorway, the 'Hand' extinguished itself on the floor. The



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noise of his partner stumbling down the stairs followed the roar of the gunshot, and Edgar went after him like a lithe black panther in the darkness. Owing to his long vigil, his eyes were more accustomed to the dark than his fugitive, and before the thief reached the opened window in the tap-room by which he had entered, he was smothered by a crash tackle from behind, and locked in a special Indian grip from which there was no escape.

The Rose and Crown was now an uproar of noise, shouting and screaming suddenly broke out as lanterns and candles were lighted, and above it all came the booming roar of Edgar's voice calling for a rope. It was soon provided and the burglar was securely tied up and left for the night, while the dead body of his comrade was carried downstairs and laid out in the passage.

The dead hand was found and examined by the shocked company and Edgar gave a full account of his night's vigil and the successful outcome. Not the least surprising revelation to the landlord was the sudden command of English shown by the drovers in the excitement of the great disturbance. A toast was drunk in the tap room, to the hero of the hour, and although there was little sleep for the rest of the household that night, Edgar was soon taking a well-earned rest.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### THE BLACK OX BANK

THE following day was far advanced by the time all the documents connected with the killing of Hounslow Dick and the nocturnal invasion of the Rose and Crown were finally completed and signed. The shrivelled hand was locked away in safe-keeping, to be produced as evidence at the trial of the captured burglar. The magistrate was satisfied that everything was in order and the drovers were allowed to proceed on their way.

During their short stay in the village, the five men had attracted considerable attention from the Maidenhead people. The handsome Edgar in particular had received many shy smiles and waves from members of the fair sex, and these overtures had not been unnoticed by the other four.

'If we don't get away from by here pretty soon, we'll have to drag old Edgar away with us,' ventured Dewi, as they were preparing to take to the road. 'Edgar's not used to having the women after him,' he concluded.

'No, you're quite right, Dewi,' replied Edgar. 'Got no room for women in my life, managed all right without 'em so far, I can go a bit further by myself,' he said, adjusting

one of the harness buckles on the girths of his big black mount. They brought the horses out into the stable-yard, saddled and loaded them up for the journey, then mounted and rode speedily away from the little town at a fast gallop. The revolving hoof-beats of the fresh horses kept the mud flying behind them as they rode on into the late afternoon when they settled down to their normal steady canter.

'I've been thinking a lot about what the magistrate said in Maidenhead last night, about trusting the banks more,' said Edgar. Llewelyn pricked up his ears as usual whenever the subject of money was under discussion.

'What d'you mean?' he demanded. 'You think we should put our money into Davy Jones's bank at Llandovery?'

'Exactly,' replied his brother. 'To me the only sensible thing to do is to put all this gold into Llandovery Black Ox Bank; it was started in 1799, it's been going for nearly thirty years now without a hitch. This business of carrying gold is too risky, we could have lost it all last night, you know.'

Edgar's boastful ways had long ago disappeared with the hard work at Glan Towy; now he certainly had something to boast about, and his brothers had grown to idolise him. His points of view were given full credence, but Llewelyn's reply was symbolic of the matriarchy that reigned in Wales during the period:

'Well, it all depends on what Mam says.'

Edgar's characteristic roar of laughter startled the horses, and his next statement startled his brothers just as much.

'Damn what Mam says, you craven clot, haven't you got a mind of your own, man? You're nearly forty years of age and you are talking like a schoolboy. This money goes into the Black Ox as soon as we reach Llandovery, I tell you.'

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'Well, we'll have to take it home first, whatever,' was Llewelyn's meek reply.

'All right, then, we'll take it home first if you like, but it's to be banked after that and the sooner the better.'

There was no further argument, and the five horsemen jogged along happily in the warm spring sunshine.

The principle of entrusting worldly wealth to the care of local banks took a long time to be accepted by folk who lived in remote places. To such people, gold coin seemed the only tangible form of currency, thin paper pound notes were a feeble substitute for the solid weight of gold. The idea of a bank cheque containing a signature and a sum of money written thereon, took longer still to be accepted by hill farmers.

Old Islwyn and Rebecca Morgan of Cilcwm had never taken advantage of the remarkable banking facilities that had started in the little town of Llandovery. For generations the Morgans of Glan Towy had kept their money in a hole in the kitchen wall covered by a locked door, and hidden by a picture. The sum had grown slowly as the generations of drovers passed, but now with the coming of the industrial era and the rapid growth of London, with the rising cost and demand for food, it was obvious to the Morgan brothers that the prospects of the Welsh black cattle trade with the City was very promising, and if they could continue to double their capital twice a year, they would soon be wealthy men. To Islwyn and Rebecca who had grown up in an age of agricultural destitution, the locking away of money in the house represented power and security. To the sons the principle adopted by their parents had never been questioned, the Black Ox Bank at Llandovery had always been ignored, and they accepted the family dictum. To Edgar, the idea of

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locking money away in the house was anathema, and as the countryside of Buckinghamshire went slowly past, he pondered on the best use to which the money could be put.

'Very quiet you are, mun Edgar,' said Llewelyn. 'Have I offended you or something by saying that Mani must have the gold?'

'Oh, good lord no,' replied his brother. 'But I've been wondering what's the best thing we could do with all this money when we get it home.'

The reply was instantaneous.

'Buy more cattle of course, mun, why?'

To Llewelyn there could be no other use for big sums of money other than to buy a fresh herd of cattle and return to London with them in the autumn. 'Can you think of a better way of doubling our capital?' he asked with a shrewd smile.

Edgar was silent in face of this unanswerable broadside. Whatever dreams he may have cherished of becoming a powerful financier, the simple business logic of Llewelyn was incontestable. Like many other retired army men when trying their business instincts against men of experience, Edgar began to feel his inferiority.

The conversation returned to the remarkable success of the little private bank at Llandovery owned by David Jones.

'Jones of the Black Ox Bank has done well, hasn't he?' said Edgar.

'It's supposed to be one of the best in the country,' replied his brother.

'He started with nothing, too,' said Dewi. 'Banc yr Eidion Du, he calls it. There used to be little banks like that in most of the Welsh towns until the financial crisis of 1793 smashed most of them. Then, when the Bank of England held up cash payments in 1797, small banks were opened again; it

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was then Davy Jones got started and now he's well away. They do say that no bank has got more local credit than Banc yr Eidion Du. Old Jones was a farmer's son, and they were a big family; bit of a drover he was at first, helping to take cattle to London, but money was his chief interest and look at 'im now.'

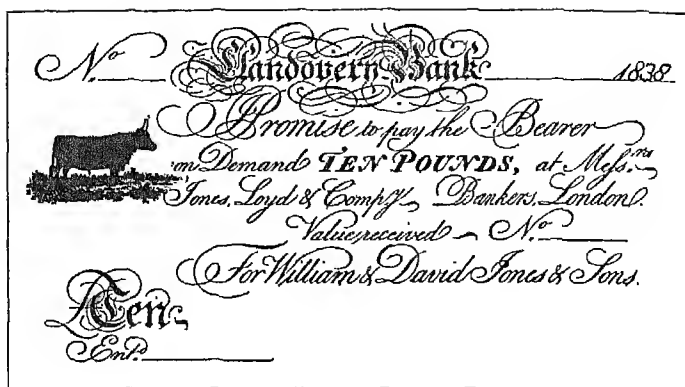
'He was made Justice of the Peace and High Sheriff of Carmarthenshire,' put in Rhys, 'and a dam' good man he was, too.'

As the five drovers talked on their return trip from London in the spring sunshine of 1838, they little realised the great future that lay before the banking enterprise which had started in their home town. At the death of its founder in 1839, he left a great estate, £90,000 in Consols, and £50,000 in cash. His three grandsons David, William and John, carried on the business traditions of the Bank yr Eidion Du at the neighbouring towns of Lampeter and Llandilo.

The Black Ox Bank could face any emergency at any time, and when other privately owned banks all over the country were cracking up, the old firm at Llandovery, Lampeter and Llandilo of David Jones and Co., kept its head high until the end.

In 1909 the goodwill of the business was sold to Lloyds Bank Ltd., and the last survivor of the privately owned banks of West Wales disappeared.

Pictorial symbols of the trade on which small banks depended for their early start, were characteristic of many regions. In the great sheep breeding district of Tregaron in Cardiganshire, a bank was started to serve the economic needs of sheep dealers. It was known as the Sheep Bank or Banc y Ddafad, and its notes contained the engraved picture of a sheep.



The ten pound note issued by the old Black Ox Bank. Reproduced here through the kind permission of the Manager of Lloyds Bank, Llandovery, where the plate is still preserved.

At Aberystwyth, then a busy port for the coastwise shipping trade, a bank was formed as early as 1762, and was known as the Ship Bank or Banc y Llong, and its notes contained the picture of a ship.

At Carmarthen where the old Furnace Bank was formed, the printing press on which the Furnace Bank pound notes were printed was discovered in 1909.

Each bank made and issued its own notes which was a great source of profit, and the pictorial symbol of the Black Ox, which was printed on the Llandovery notes, was easily recognised in a period when few people could read, and its presence inspired confidence in illiterate customers. The etched copper plates from which the old pound notes were printed are still preserved at Lloyd's Bank, Llandovery, together with other relics of its early history.

'It's amazing how many drovers have got on and reached high places you know,' said Llewelyn thoughtfully.

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'That's exactly what I mean,' replied Edgar, who was happy at last that the picture was clearing in his mind. 'That's the idea that I've got, we drovers handle big sums of money all the time, and you know as well as I do that estate agents down home often ask you to take their collected rent money up to the landlords in London, just as you took up all those poems to the Cymrodorion this time. The drovers are the people who get the training for business responsibility, d'you see what I mean?'

'I can see what you mean all right,' replied Llewelyn. 'You want to be a big public man, I know, and look after other people's affairs, but all I want to do is to look after my own business, the droving suits me all right.'

His three brothers agreed with him, and Edgar was left to ruminate on his own secret ambitions which were as yet incomplete in his restless mind.

The country between Maidenhead and the little town of Henley was wooded and hilly, and the rough road meandered between enormous forests of beech. It grew increasingly lonely as parts of the land were still heavily wooded, and only an occasional woodman's cottage relieved the monotony. A pale filigree of delicate beech leaves formed a green haze about the lower parts of the forest, and occasionally small groups of deer fled daintily between the old grey trunks of the trees.

The beauty of the Buckingham woodlands was lost to the eyes of the horsemen, for the dominant thought in the minds of each one was the prospect of a hold-up. A longer silence than usual had settled over them as they cantered purposefully along; it was a silence that betrayed their thoughts. To Edgar it was the grim quietness of men about to go into battle, and he hated it. Their tension was suddenly



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expressed by Dewi when he asked, 'Got your pistols loaded, Edgar?'

'Of course I have,' he retorted, 'and my blade is ready, too, if we meet up with a gentleman of the highway here, I want you all to look in my direction when he asks for money, because that'll give him the idea that I'm carrying it, then leave the swine to me. If he fires at me, and I'm disabled, go in and get him before he has time to reload, and leave him dangling by the neck from one of these branches, like that chap in Newgate; no half measures, mind, don't bother about me, you get him. But it's difficult to plan the thing in too much detail because we don't know what form it'll take. I may pretend that I don't know any English, and if I speak to him in Welsh, remember that it's you I'll be talking to, same as yesterday, and then do exactly as I tell you.'

But, fortunately for any members of the High Toby trade who may have used that stretch of road, they were otherwise engaged on the day the Morgan brothers passed. They descended the steep winding hill to the Thames again, and the bridge by which they crossed to the wide high street of Henley and the comfort of the Raven Inn.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE COTSWOLD SHEPHERD

AFTER Henley, the Oxford road took them over a richer landscape of good grassland. The farms were well planned, and over the recently rolled ploughland, the first haze of pale green corn shoots tinted the brown earth and told of the new year's wheat crop that was on the way.

In the early stages of the ride, the drovers nursed their horses gently, but as the miles went by and the animals settled down to a cantering speed, their movements became freer. Each of the gaunt riders rose and fell in the saddle in rhythm with the hoof-beats of his mount. The horses needed little urging, for in their animal minds the directional pull for home was growing ever stronger, and in the spring wind and the April showers that swept across the rolling Berkshire hills, their eager movements bore their masters on towards home. Great care had been taken in the choice of the five horses, the breeding and age had been matched so that stamina and pace remained equal on a long day's journey.

'It's about a hundred and fifty miles from here to

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Llandovery,' announced Llewelyn as they came to the cross-roads at Nettlebed.

'How long will it take us?' inquired Edgar.

'About four days, I shouldn't wonder,' was the quick reply. 'Funny we had no hold-ups last night the other side of Henley, good highwaymen country that. I'm glad we got through safely, it's better on this open land, and the further we get away from London, the better. We'll make for North Leach in the Cotswolds tonight, good pub there, it's only about fifty miles, better to take four days over it than break the horses to try it in three days.'

There were grunts of approval, and they continued in silence for many miles, over Gandsdown Hill where a corpse swung on its gibbet and on to Benson, Shillingford and Dorchester Abbey, where they dismounted beneath the sign of the Plough and Harrow, to rest the horses and quench their thirst.

On resuming the ride, they soon left the Oxford highway to cross the Thames at the village of Abingdon. They paid to cross by the old bridge, and for some time after leaving the village, the harsh sound of the toll-keeper's voice rang in their ears—'Saxpence to pay, saxpence to pay.'

'Saxpence to pay, Manufferni,' mumbled Rhys when they had finally thrown off the yapping dogs of the village.

His humorous gift of mimicry brought a burst of laughter from his brothers.

'Never mind machgeni,' said Llewelyn, 'it's better than going through Oxford; we'll dodge several gates on this road along the Windrush valley, then we'll cut out Whitney again and reach the Gloucester highway beyond the town and dodge the Whitney gate as well. We've spent a fortune on toll-gates since we left London.'

'It's the toll-gates that spoils it,' agreed Ivor, 'pity we couldn't burn the bloody lot down on the way home, isn't it, Edgar?' and he turned to look at his brother who, since the affair over the highwaymen, had won their respect and admiration as a solution to all unsavoury problems.

'It's a funny thing that you should be saying that,' replied his brother. 'I've been thinking a lot about the toll-gates. D'you know what the Bible says?—"And they blessed Rebecca and said unto her let thy seed possess the gates of those which hate them." It's damned uncanny that you, the son of a Rebecca, should be talking about burning down gates; it comes in the book of Genesis. Don't you worry, boy bach, I've been thinking a good bit about that very subject. If we've got to take the law into our own hands and start smashing up the toll-gates, it's got to be properly organised, we must be sure of a good public backing, and the work must be done by a big crowd of farmers, and they'll have to be disguised. I know it's against the law but it's high time that a gesture of protest was made against the damned Turnpike Trusts to wake the Government up. Something's got to be done, and the sooner we go into action the better. Feeling is running pretty high in the Vale of Towy just now, everybody's complaining. I think we ought to stage a meeting as soon as we get back.'

'What about all your fox-hunting friends?' broke in Rhys. 'What are they going to think of you if you start that sort of thing in the county?'

'Fat lot I care about those silly devils,' he retorted. 'The gentry are no good to the country, it's the poor farmers and cottagers that produce the goods from the land, that really matter, the little men who bred the four hundred beasts that

we brought to London as food for Cockneys; those are the people I'm thinking about.'

The brothers smiled to themselves as they listened to Edgar's strange sentiments.

'Bachgen, but you've changed since you first came home, you only wanted for to keep company with the toffs then; what's changed you, mun?' asked Llewelyn.

'Oh, I've seen so much of the world,' he replied. 'I've seen so many sides of life in India, now I'm beginning to get things straight at last. This job that you boys are doing is a fine thing. Don't you realise what the drovers are doing for Wales? Where would the hill farmers be if there were no drovers to buy their cattle and risk everything to get them to the big markets as we've done? We are the cargo ships of the land, fy machgen i, we've piloted two hundred tons of human food over land for two hundred miles. We've suffered great hardship, insults, risked a fortune to buy them, and risked a bigger fortune in taking it home. We drovers are the chief means of commerce between England and Wales, we are the agents who make life possible between the breeders of cattle and the people who eat them. Yes, brothers, we are the men who matter most on the roads of England today. My fox-hunting friends can go to the devil, they are of no real importance, this is the life for me. I don't believe there's anything finer in the world. Only one thing spoils it, and it's the damned toll-gates.'

For the duration of Edgar's speech his brothers had ridden in silence beside him, listening to and enjoying his point of view. They had been making the long journey twice a year ever since they had been old enough, and its monotony and hardship had blunted their enthusiasm. But Edgar approached it with a fresh eye and a rich philosophy which found

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expression in his words, and they felt uplifted at their importance in the scheme of things until his mention of the toll-gates when their rising spirits were suddenly deflated again, and they returned to a long tirade against the barriers which so often stretched across the roads ahead. Thus the five horsemen, riding proudly abreast with their faces towards home, with four thousand golden guineas in their pockets, felt the surging of active revolt against the hated turnpike gates of Wales.

It was a revolt that was destined to flare up into the great national uprising which culminated in the Rebecca Riots and paved the way for the obliteration of the gates and the establishment of the open highways of a later age.

Under Llewelyn's leadership they rode on in silence along the Cotswold by-ways. Uphill and down dale, fording clear trout streams in the valleys, and galloping through giant flocks of sheep and lambs that grazed the bare hills of the high Wold.

'Wonderful sheep country,' shouted Edgar as they thundered along.

'Aye, all bred for their wool here,' replied one of his brothers. 'The finest in the world, they've been doing it for hundreds of years, made tremendous money out of it.'

The horses were enjoying the long run as much as the men, and one by one the miles flew by until at last they came to the rough Gloucester highway and were soon refreshing themselves and feeding on bread and cheese at one of the taverns in the village of Burford. Half an hour later they were in the saddle again and riding towards the slowly westering sun.

At some little distance beyond Burford, while moving over a shoulder of the gently moulded hills, Edgar suddenly

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noticed a strange enclosure formed of straw-thatched walls away to their left in a corner of a field.

'What's that?' he shouted.

'Oh, it's only one o' them Cotswold lambing folds,' replied Ivor. 'The shepherds round these parts take more care of their stock than we do at home, they've got to I suppose, they're not so hardy as ours, and the wool's so valuable. The old shepherds live with the ewes in the field during the lambing at this time of the year.'

'Nefoedd y byd, you don't say, let's go and have a look at it,' he replied.

The five men turned their horses off the highway and rode over to the thatched enclosure. The sight that greeted them within the straw-set hurdle walls was enough to warm the heart of anyone.

The entire floor of the enclosure was covered with straw and about thirty big Cotswold sheep were lying in the sheltered warmth of the straw walls while groups of awkward new-born lambs stumbled and fretted at their mothers' sides. Half-eaten swedes and mangolds littered the ground, and round the edges of the fold a cleverly constructed thatched roof gave protection from rain, and over it all lay the pungent rancid odour of birth. A blue-grey bobtail sheepdog was tethered in one corner, and a very old shepherd sat beside it, smoking a long clay pipe. He was hatless and his white hair and beard framed a bronzed and wrinkled face in which the wisdom of the hills was clearly written.

He stood up and walked between his sheep to see what the strangers wanted.

'Great sheep country you've got here,' said Edgar by way of introduction to a chat.

'Oh, aye,' replied the old man, 'it's the wool that counts

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ye see, that's the thing we lives by in these parts, that's what's made the Cotswolds, and I shouldn't wonder if it's not th' old sheep o' the Wold that's made England great, and made the British Empire, too, if it comes to that.'

It would have been hard to find anyone to whom such a claim could sound more absurd than the Indian Empire builder to whom the words were addressed. Edgar recalled the supreme sacrifice made by so many of his comrades in the cause of India, and his own fifteen years of service. Now to be told by this old white-smocked yokel that his sheep had played a major part in the Empire. The old man felt the power of a pair of steel-grey eyes blaze down at him from beneath black eyebrows arched in scornful surprise.

'What damned rot,' he replied. 'How could your damned sheep be of such importance as that. We didn't come here to listen to such rubbish.'

The old man returned his gaze, and there was conviction in his firm reply.

'Aye aye, sorr, there be no doubt about it, 'twere the sheep o' these parts what first built up the greatness of old England I tell ye. It's the wool trade done it. D'ye know, mister, that fer centuries the wool trade o' these parts was the most important thing that ever 'appened in the varmin' world o' this country.'

The shrewd old man had of course recognised the Welsh accents of the drovers, and rightly assumed that they were cattle men from beyond the border, and he continued.

'There be a great deal o' talk these days about the trade in all these 'erds of cattle and sheep they takes up from Wales to the City of London, but what about it? They London volks eats the lot and that's the end of it, it don't do our country no real good at all, sorr. Now, take the sheep o' the



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Wold, fer instance, there's the finest wool in the world, it's sent away from this country, great ships full of our Cotswold wool. Britain gets money for that from vurrin parts, that's turning our products into money, not eatin' it ourselves. Aye, sorr, it's the wool of these old dry hills 'ave been the gold mines of England for 'undreds of years, that's 'istory, that is, and you can't take that away from us and our old sheep. Then there were so much attackin' an' pirates on the seas that we 'ad to send men-o'-war to take care o' our wool ships, an' that were the start o' the British Navy, mister. British 'istory be tangled up in Cotswold wool: London, Oxford and Winchester were the chief centres o' wool trade.

'Cotswold sheep's one of England's oldest breeds, bred for centuries for the sake o' their wool. Take a look at our churches and cottages and fine houses hereabouts, there's nothin' finer 'n Cotswold architecture in all the world, they was all built out o' wool money. Look what they old monks did, cleared away forests to make sheep pasture, and became rich from wool. Doan you realise, mister, that wi'out sheep ye could 'na leave your fireside because ye'd have no clothes to yer back; aye, an' from Cotswold it all began and started this old country on the road to greatness and wealth.

'Can ye tell me what the Lord Chancellor of England sits on in parliment? Can ye tell me that one? 'Tis a big bag o' wool, the Woolsack, to show that Britain owes 'er greatness to sheep, and 'twere Cotswold sheep, sorr.'

Edgar Morgan had crossed swords with many worthy opponents in his lifetime, and he invariably came off best; on this occasion he had insulted a simple old shepherd who knew very little beyond the care and importance of his sheep, but his knowledge on that subject was a dominant obsession.

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The little old patriarch stood in the straw of his strong-smelling concentrated maternity ward, and was about to continue his lecture when there came a low moan from one of the sheep behind him and he turned away from his audience. His academic interest in the economic significance of wool in the history of Britain was suddenly dwarfed by the transcendental importance of seeing that one more lamb came safely into the world.

The five men watched closely to see the age-old operation of helping a ewe at an awkward lamb birth.

For some moments the old man stood looking down at the sheep in her labour. After each heaving strain she would look round, expecting in the instinctive sequence of parturition, to find her lamb on the straw behind her, but each time she was disappointed, and would lie back with a grunt and try once more to expel the lamb.

The old man knelt in the straw beside her for a closer examination of the birth progress, then he stood up and returned to his audience.

'She'm not quite ready yet,' he intimated. 'Give 'er about twenty minutes maybe. 'Er gets the same trouble every lambing, when lambs 'ead is 'arf out, 'er skin comes tight over 'is forehead and I 'aves to pull it back over 'is 'ead to get 'is ears clear, then out 'e pops, but she'm not ready yet. We'll 'ave to bide a while longer. 'Er'll 'ave to open up a bit more yet, big single it's going to be, I can tell by the size o' his front paws, they'm just showing now.'

To the droving hill farmers of Wales, whose half-wild mountain sheep dropped their lambs with ease on the open hill, the devotion shown by the old man to his delicate valuable breed was very intriguing. The sudden call for the shepherd's skilled attention had effectively quenched the fire

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of his indignation. He was first and foremost a simple craftsman in sheep husbandry, the role of historian was of little importance, to him the successful birth of one lamb was of greater importance than all the history of the Cotswold wool trade of the past five hundred years. Now he was quite prepared to let bygones be bygones. The drovers thanked him for his tales, waved farewell and galloped back to the road to resume the long ride over the hills towards North Leach and the end of a fifty-mile ride.

On the following morning they enjoyed a later breakfast than usual, and then rode quietly down the long gradients until they came to the western edge of the Cotswold hills that overlooks the wide plain of the Severn and the ancient city of Gloucester. On reaching the city they rested the horses and consumed a hearty lunch at the New Inn.

It was market day at Gloucester and the famous old coaching inn was crowded with dealers and farmers, and the rooms rang with the roar of conversation. The five drovers denied themselves the pleasure of joining in the market chatter which centred on the current price trends, as once it was known that they were returning from an early droving trip to Smithfield, it would be assumed that they carried the money on them, and the less that fact was advertised the better. So, under strict injunctions from the secretive Llewelyn, they took no part in the talk, and drew no attention to themselves.

Then they journeyed on again, and once over the Severn they took the road to Newent, and finally came again to the valley of the Wye and the city of Hereford in the evening light.

Edgar was anxious to learn the fate of the coach driver who had caused them so much trouble on the way up, but

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Llewelyn urged him to remain as inconspicuous as possible. They had spent four hard days in the saddle and it needed little inducement to prevail upon each other to climb the oaken stairs and fall into a deep untroubled slumber, in which they remained until frantic banging on the bedroom door awoke them in time for a midday lunch on the following day.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### HOME AGAIN TO WALES

WHEN they came again to Willersley Toll-Gate, Old Harry was still seated in front of his little house. He stood up as they approached, his leather money-bag dangling officiously before his portly figure. He unlocked the gate and relieved each rider of 3d. as he passed through. Edgar took a quick look at the hinges and noted how easily the gate could be lifted off the spikes on which it hung.

'That's the last one, now the road's clear all the way to Cilcwm,' he shouted with enthusiasm. Then they rode on beside the Wye with eyes set on the distant skyline of the Welsh hills that represented home and safety.

At the Rhyd Spence Inn they paused to drink a toast to the day when roads would be clear of toll-gates all the way to London. Some distance beyond the inn, they crossed the border into Wales and started the long climb to Clyro Top. At last the green hills of Radnorshire lay before them, fresh and peaceful in the evening light. Bird song poured up from the tiny glens on either side and the voices of curlew, plover and grouse rang over the high moors in a bubbling cascade of music to welcome the tired riders home again to Wales. From far and near the evening chorus of lambs and fretful

mothers echoed from hill-top to hill-top as the red sun sank beyond the distant hills of Cardigan. With the coming of the soft spring night, the myriad voices of Radnor were stilled at last, and in the darkness a group of tiny lights called the travellers down to the village of Painscastle and a roaring welcome at the tavern of the Black Ox.

The news that the drovers had returned spread quickly through the village, and crowds poured in to listen in rapt attention to the tales of London which were eased from the lips of the travellers with a liberal supply of beer. The stories of Smithfield, the London Welsh Society, the public execution, the growth of trade, the industries, the buildings, and the way of dealing with highwaymen were all told. Edgar's trick of inviting the highwayman to fire his only shot into his hat brought the biggest cheer of the night, and the manner of his death-dealing swing with the Gurkha blade filled them with awe. The night ended in lusty singing as all such nights in the wild Welsh hills were prone to do, until with the coming of dawn the people of Painscastle tottered away to bed, and where the harp left off playing, the dawn chorus of bird song took over, to herald the drovers' day of return.

The sun was well over the hills by the time the Black Ox Inn was astir and the travellers had finished breakfast. Spirits were high as they saddled up and tightened harness girths for the last day's ride. The horses were restless and eager to be off, for the spring scent of the mountains had reached them in their stable and they knew that they were nearing home.

They took the valley road out of the Radnor hills and came again to Erwood in the densely wooded valley of the Wye. The wide ford was shallow and they waded over to the other side, then crossed the main coach road and climbed the long steep hill of the Twmpath to the cattle route over

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the Eppynt Moors, and as they climbed, the high hills of the four South Wales counties rose to hem their wide horizons. The music of the curlews had changed from the eager courtship calls of March to tense anxious cries of warning to their flightless young. They were equally beautiful, and stimulating to the five horsemen whose home they shared, for the voices of the birds were the first notes of welcome on the home stretch. At the lonely Drovers' Arms they stopped for a yarn and a quart with the landlord, then resumed the journey westward along the hoof-cut cattle highway that followed the spine of the moor where they had once driven through the blizzard of snow.

The sun shone throughout the afternoon and the surrounding skyline hills changed shape as the miles went by. The far-off hills that cradled the Towy rose and fell behind each other in ever-fading tones of pearly blues and greys. Then, as they reached the end of the moorland highway and started on the long descent to Cynhordy, the evening chorus of the birds rose up in a flood of music from the wooded vale. They forded the river and climbed the last hill on willing horses over Cilcwm Mountain until the deep and winding glen of the Towy spread beneath them and the white-washed homestead of Glantowy farm lay quiet in the shadow of the dark hills. The sun appeared to rest for a moment like a giant ruby lantern on the rim of the opposite hill, it was a moment of transcendent splendour as all the upland heights reflected the deep pink glow of the setting sun. In the quiet hush of the coming night the riders almost felt the movement of the world as the far-off skyline rose to steal across the sun. Then the belt of twilight rushed westward over the land and the alpen glow was gone, and night followed the happy riders down into the valley and home.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE REBECCA RIOTS

AS the months passed into summer, life at Glan Towy followed its time honoured pattern, and the brothers were busy about the seasonal tasks of the farm. Very gradually at first, small groups of cattle were brought in to begin the new herd which was destined to follow the same route to Smithfield Market in the autumn.

The fields, which had been so heavily manured by the late winter herd, had been well rested and a heavy hay crop was scythed and harvested into ricks. The sheep flock had lambed, and eventually the ewes were gathered for the shearing. As always at Glan Towy, this took place on the third Monday and Tuesday in June. Every farm in the district had its long-established shearing date, and every farmer over a wide area attended to give neighbourly assistance.

On the day preceding the Glan Towy date, a dozen men on horseback rode the unmarked boundaries of the sheep walk, and with the help of dogs gathered the flock of nearly a thousand breeding ewes into the home paddocks adjoining the yard. At an early hour on the following day the shearers and catchers gathered for action. Shearing benches were



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arranged beside a wall, and each man sat on his bench with shears and whetstone. The catchers brought the ewes to the benches while the skilled men bent to their task with a sweeping slicing action of the hand-shears. The little ewes were quickly fleeced, branded with an M, and the condition of the front teeth examined for age to determine whether they should be sold in the autumn. After the catchers had placed the sheep in position for the shearers, they would roll up the fleece of the previous one into a tight ball, twisting one end of the wool into a thick strand which encircled the rolled fleece and was tucked in. It was then thrown into one of the wool bags; then another was caught and escorted to the bench.

To Edgar, who had been accustomed to the forceful discipline and tight organisation of the army, this easy happy-go-lucky atmosphere of the shearing day was puzzling. There were no orders or regimentation of the men, and yet the work progressed at a natural easy speed. The catchers kept the shearers busy, and the shearers kept the catchers on the run, for they were all sheep breeders and each man hoped that when his shearing date came round, that other flocks would be completed and the great party of helpers would be free to help him. Behind this simple plan lay the success of the great organisation of hand-shearing mountain flocks, an organisation that had a tradition of centuries behind it.

The day was hot and beer was available for over a hundred helpers. At midday they ceased work and sat in the shade of the barn where great helpings of bread and cheese were consumed. Work was soon resumed and carried on until the late evening when half the Glan Towry flock had been completed, and were released to where their lambs awaited them. With the loss of their thick coats, the little mothers

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appeared to be half their size, now a dazzling white and rather shapeless, their lambs could not recognise them except by sound, and the bleating of five hundred ewes blended with the voices of as many lambs to produce a mass blaring orchestra of a thousand strident voices that could be heard for miles among the hills. It gradually subsided as the pairs found each other and moved up the hill under the hereditary instinct of mountain sheep to climb upwards at night's approach to get away from dangers that lurked in the valleys throughout the long period of their evolution. At last they were gone and the shearers had washed, and a great banquet of boiled ham and roast mutton was consumed on trestle-tables in the barn.

Edgar had taken no active part in the day's operations, his skill with the shears was in no way comparable to that of the visiting craftsmen, and he had no wish to make an exhibition of the great length of time which it would take him to shear one sheep. Besides, everyone addressed him as Mr Morgan and that was how he wished it to remain.

During the evening he mingled with the men and might have been observed in earnest discussion with one after another of the more elderly and responsible of the helpers. One after another he had sounded them on their views over the toll-gate problem, and without exception, the reactions of all had been fiery and instantaneous.

'Come to the house at nine o'clock,' had been Edgar's parting words to each man with whom he had spoken during the day. So as the time drew near the selected party of men reported at the kitchen door and were shown into the parlour where Edgar was waiting for them. There was a respectful solemnity about their bearing which contrasted strangely with the riotous din of merriment that came from the

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singing crowds in the barn across the yard. Forms and chairs had been brought in and the party was soon seated and ready to listen to whatever Edgar and his brothers had to say.

'Well, gentlemen,' he began, 'it's very good of you to give up some of your time tonight to talk over this subject of the toll-gates with me.' It was a flattering gesture to call them gentlemen and still more to suggest that they were to join in the discussion, though it was obvious that they were to be treated to Edgar Morgan's well-known views regarding the turnpike trustees.

'You all know my views on the subject of toll-gates, and I think I know your views. Now, before we go any further into the subject, let's hear if there's anyone who is in favour of maintaining them.'

There followed an awkward sniggering and glancing round, but it was soon apparent that they were all of one mind.

'Now, then,' continued Edgar. 'I've given a great deal of thought to this problem. I've ridden back from London, and around South Wales a bit, and nowhere in England will you find so many gates as here in South Wales, it's a national scandal, I tell you, and the time is soon to come when something'll be done about it,' and he paused to allow his words to take effect. 'The big landlords are putting up gates across roads that run through their land, and all parish councils are doing the same. Our cattle trade is becoming impossible, and unless you people are prepared to act in the matter, the movement of stock will become impossible, the droving will be stopped, and the cattle trade with England will be finished, I tell you, and you all know what that will mean to you. It's only the dealers and drovers who really know what's going on in other parts of the country, you gentlemen stay

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at home. But you can take it from me it's got to be stopped, and if the government won't take any notice of our appeals, then we'll have to do something that'll make them take notice.'

When Edgar Morgan aired his views, it was usually done with a voice of thunder, but on this occasion he spoke with a quiet and icy deliberation to which his audience was totally unaccustomed. They sensed in his grim determination the birth of momentous events.

'I'm no law breaker, gentlemen,' he continued, 'it goes against the grain for me to run counter to authority, but things have come to such a state that a stand has got to be made, and I've got no alternative but to suggest to you that when the right time comes, we must strike against this evil thing. We'll not be alone, I can tell you, all over the three counties of Carmarthen, Pembroke and Cardigan men are discussing the toll-gates just as we are doing, and when the time comes for us to go into action, we must all do it at the same time to show unity. In every part of the country, the gates must be pulled down, smashed and burnt, and only by a united effort like that, can we draw the Government's attention to this evil.'

Edgar had been watching the faces of the men as he spoke, and it was obvious that they were with him to a man, and ready to go to any length to start the havoc. As soon as he finished, a chorus of eager questions broke out, which assured him on this point. He held up his hand for peace to answer.

'You all seem to want to know when we can start. That I cannot say just now—not until the late autumn, probably in the winter, but I must ask you again to trust me, and wait until the time is ripe; mind you, it'll take a bit of planning

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to get all the groups ready and the date fixed. I'll send for you all to meet again. Remember, now, this is all dead secret, no need to tell anyone what we have discussed here tonight.'

Edgar wisely omitted to tell them that he had already spoken to similar groups of men at the Tanners' Arms in Carmarthen, the Dolau cothi Inn at Pumpsaint and many other places on his journeyings in search of cattle for the autumn drove. He realised the dangerous course that he was taking in stirring up so much widespread discontent and incitement of so many people to riot. Each group that he spoke to was unaware of the scope of his activities, and often had no idea who he was or whence he came, and no word of his preparations was ever committed on paper.

No historian in after years has ever succeeded in pinpointing the chief organiser of the wild Rebecca Riots that broke out simultaneously all over South Wales in 1839. The pattern of each attack was identical and the timing and unusual disguise of the rioters in all parts of the country clearly showed the hand of a leader whose preparations were thorough and secret. They reveal the work of a planner of campaigns who made the most of the feelings of the outraged peasantry of the time and the rough and ready weapons at his disposal.

As the summer months passed into autumn Edgar Morgan and his brothers continued to range far and wide in search of cattle to complete another herd which was gradually built up at Glan Towy on the same lines as the previous one.

Edgar took a more active part in the dealings with producers and his continual journeying about South Wales took him ever further afield. By autumn, the stock had once again risen to the neighbourhood of four hundred and they

divided into two parties and drove to Smithfield, to return with an even bigger profit, for London prices had risen. But once again the toll-gates claimed a crippling share of the gains, and by the time the brothers had banked the gold at the Black Ox Bank, the sense of frustration after their efforts, took the edge off the satisfaction they were entitled to for their great enterprise.

A spirit of despondency was spreading, and whenever groups of people met and talked, the same subject always claimed priority.

Wherever Edgar went he was tackled with the problem of the toll-gates.

'When do we start, Mr Morgan?' was the questioning cry from everyone, and Edgar's non-committal answers puzzled many people. The fact was that his name had already become associated with the coming insurrection in his own district to such an extent that he began to fear for his own safety in the legal retribution which he felt was bound to follow. Throughout the Llandovery district his name became so closely associated with the abolition of toll-gates that he finally decided to leave the district for a proposed visit to some friends in Monmouthshire. But his actual route took him westward over the windy hills to the village of Caio where he quietly paid toll to pass through the turnpike, then called at the farm of a friend where a secret conversation took place. Afterwards he journeyed on to Lampeter where he held further talks, and rode on along the Teivy valley calling at Llanybyther, Pencader, Llandussyl and Newcastle Emlyn where he spent the night. On the next day he rode to Cardigan, and then over the bleak Prescelly mountains until he reached Haverfordwest where he passed the second night. On the third day he rode to Narberth, Whitland and

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St Clears, still calling at the homes of influential farmers whom he had met during the previous summer. The fourth day found him at Carmarthen where he called upon many acquaintances. After that his route took him into the western part of Glamorgan where he rode from one contact to another, always holding the same conversation at each port of call. On returning to Carmarthen, he came northward along the wide valley of the Towy, where his road passed through great estates and toll-gates hung across the roads. He paid up quietly and continued into Llandilo where he spent the night at one of the little town's many taverns. He continued his ride by devious routes to Talley and Llansawel where he made further calls and returned to the vale of Towy at Llangadock, reaching home at Cilcwm long after dark, his secret mission complete.

The purpose of his many calls had been to outline the plan of campaign for the coming offensive to which he had given much thought. His purpose lay far deeper than the actual destruction of a number of gates which could very quickly be replaced. The method of doing it had to be carried out in such a way as to draw maximum attention to the campaign. The riots had to have a name, and be shrouded in a phantasy that was common to all, public imagination had to be captured, and he hoped that the newspapers would bring the maximum publicity to the plan.

Little did Edgar Morgan guess at the success that was to crown his efforts.

The substance of his orders to the various leaders of the attacks, was that the riots were to be called the Rebecca Riots. Everyone taking part in the attack was to be disguised in women's clothing, and be known as the 'Daughters of Rebecca,' and their faces were to be blackened to avoid

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recognition by the keeper of the toll-gate. The attacks should be made with as much noise as possible, near the hour of midnight, the gate-posts sawn off at ground level, the gate smashed up and burnt, but the gate-house and privacy of the keeper was not to be violated.

Edgar clearly foresaw the immediate police action that would be taken by the military on orders from the Government. He knew that detachments of militia would be sent hot-foot to each previous night's outrage, only to learn of the destruction of another gate on the following night in some other part of the county. He prepared a well-planned roster of dates for the destruction of most of the gates which was calculated to wear out the finest detachments of cavalry.

He chuckled wickedly to himself as he thought of the hopeless mess the army commanders would be committed to, when it came to trying to catch the illusive phantom of Rebecca and her daughters at work. This was a job after his own heart, he had enjoyed his secret mission immensely, and felt that the wheels had been set in motion. His long training in the undercover work of the Indian Army Intelligence departments was once again finding expression, now in the relief of injustices to his own people of West Wales. The bonfires had been built, and only a match was needed to set the torch of liberty alight.

He said nothing of his trip or its purpose to any of his brothers, and kept his active part in the coming riots a complete secret. Whenever the toll-gate controversy was mentioned Edgar maintained a mysterious apathy that was puzzling to the folk of Glan Towy.

He had arranged with a farmer near St Clears that the Trefechan toll-gate was to be the first to come down, and others were to be destroyed in quick succession.



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Early in the morning of that memorable day, he saddled up and rode southward along the valley to Carmarthen and on to St Clears to the farm of one Morgan Nicholas whom he had previously spoken to.

On arriving at the farmyard he was dismayed to find the family busy about their tasks and showing no sign of the suppressed excitement which he had imagined. When he managed to engage the old man privately, he began to voice his fears.

'Do you know what date it is, Morgan Nicholas?'

'Yes, of course I do, Mr Morgan Bach,' was the quick reply. 'Do you think I could forget that we was to be the first off, no indeed, everything's all right mun, there's about thirty of us, got everything ready too, we 'ave, with shawls and bonnets and skirts just like you said, drop dead, Mr Morgan. Are you comin' with us?'

'Of course, Morgan Nicholas,' replied Edgar. 'That's why I came here. I want to see how it goes off.'

'Right you are then, you shall see all right. Twm Swar is bringing his big cross-cut and Dai Dammo another one; them and two others, Dai Limestone and Shoni Ben Loft, is to saw the posts down, big job that'll be, they're solid oak. Oh, we've got it all planned in detail I can tell you, Mister. But I'll tell you one thing, they'll be the daftest-looking set of men you ever seen,' and he chortled with merriment at the recollection. 'Men dressed up as women, jiawcs mun, whatever made you think of that, Morgan?' he asked gleefully.

'Well, the first point is for disguise,' replied Edgar, 'it's easy to get, every man can find a skirt and bonnet; but the real point is that if everybody uses the same dress, the Government is more likely to take notice. They'll know then

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that there's somebody doing a bit of planning behind the scenes. When they start to feel like that, they are more likely to treat the movement with respect in the end. But don't bother about asking too many questions, Nicholas, you get on with the job and see that everybody's there.'

'They'll be there, never fear,' replied the old man. 'Come you in for a cup of tea, but don't tell my missus nothin', mind you.' Edgar promised, and followed the old man into the kitchen where he shared the evening meal and held the family spellbound with tales of India and the City of London, until at last he noticed a sly wink from Morgan Nicholas and he knew that the moment had come.

It was the fateful night of January 16th, 1839, and the cold wind stung the faces of the two men as they groped their way through the darkness of the yard, muffling themselves in the collars of their greatcoats. The horses were brought out of the stable, and they mounted and rode slowly along the muddy lane.

At last the old man broke the silence of tension that lay over them, as he asked:

'What iss puzzling me, Mr Morgan, is why you should take such an interest in the toll-gate business. You've only been in Wales a year after coming back from India; it's taken us a lifetime to get worked up enough for this.'

'Aye, well,' replied Edgar. 'I suppose it's because I've come back to it with a fresh eye, that sees all these dreadful persecutions that you poor beggars have to suffer; add to that the fact that I've ridden to London and back twice with last year's droving, and add to that the fact that this country wants an experienced leader who knows how to set about it, and there you are. I've a strong fancy that my plan'll

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work, the whole country's in such a state that once this thing gets going nothing's going to stop it. I may be in jail within a week and transported for life, but I'm taking that risk, I've taken much bigger ones before and they've nearly always come off, and I don't see why this should fail.'

The old man looked up at the giant figure who cantered easily beside him and he felt the great confidence of him as they rode on down the hill and through the little village to the tavern of the Plough and Harrow, that lay some distance beyond. As they approached, the hearty noise of drunken singing came to meet them on the cold night wind.

'The boys is there all right,' shouted Nicholas as they dismounted, 'and a fine mood they're in, for sure.'

On entering the Plough and Harrow it was obvious to the two newcomers that the revellers were already roaring drunk and ready for anything.

After swallowing a speedy quart, Edgar stood on a chair and roared for silence.

'Gentlemen,' he shouted, and the words almost choked him as he surveyed the rabble of drunken farm servants who stood gawking up at him. He could see that there was no point in delivering either an impassioned oration, or a fighting speech to outline the deep significance of the night's operation. It was obvious that they would be unable to concentrate on even him for more than a minute, so he went straight to the point.

'Gentlemen,' he repeated, 'Morgan Nicholas has asked you to come with him to smash Trefechan gate tonight. Are you coming?'

There was an angry roar of approval, and behind the intoxication from the drink, Edgar sensed in that sub-human growl, a deeper intoxication from the mass hatred

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of public injustice; on that first night he heard the knell of doom for the South Wales turnpike system.

'Then blacken your faces and ride with us to Trefechan and down with the toll-gates,' he roared.

He had started off many a battle-charge of trained men in his time, but this was the easiest charge he had ever started. Tables and tankards were sent flying in the rush for the door that followed his words, and he and Nicholas were the last to get outside.

The scene before the Plough and Harrow presented an amazing spectacle that was the fore runner of hundreds of similar scenes that were to be re-enacted in all parts of South Wales in the months that followed. Torches and lanterns lit up the work of putting on skirts and bonnets amid great laughter. Then sledge-hammers, crowbars and saws were picked up and the first army of Rebecca was ready for action.

'To Trefechan,' shouted Morgan Nicholas at the top of his voice, and they turned as one man in the direction of the hated toll-gate.

They made so much noise on the way that the country folk who lived along the route came running to see what was afoot, many joined in and by the time that they had covered the two miles to the gate, the numbers had increased to well over a hundred people of all ages.

On reaching the long white gate that stretched across the road, the speedy work of demolition was started. Twenty cross-cut saws made short work of the heavy railings, and the posts came down in a matter of minutes. Dead bushes were quickly gathered, and branches were piled on top by eager hands, the fire was lighted and the sawn-off rails of the gate made a great blaze on the muddy road outside the

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little toll-house. Then as the fire got under way, Edgar saw the incredible sight of this crowd of drunken men with blackened faces, and wearing the discarded clothes of their womenfolk, forming a circle round the first funeral pyre of the turnpike system, and started singing with joy and relief in their new-found freedom. The idea of the quick erection of a second gate by the Turnpike Trustees had not yet occurred to them. Then Edgar, still seated on horseback, came forward to call for silence while he gave a brief address.

'Daughters of Rebecca,' he began, 'tonight it has been your privilege to strike the first blow at one of the many great injustices suffered by the people of Wales. You have tonight lit a fire that will start a chain of fires wherever an illegal toll-gate has been erected. You are the first, but your example will be followed, never fear. Go home quietly, and tell no one that you were here tonight, for you must watch out for retaliation from your magistrates. Tomorrow night Rebecca will strike at another gate far away from here and so on and on until most of them are gone. The next is to be at Pentre, then Maes Wholan, then Mynydd y Gareg. After that Rebecca goes to Tavernspite in Pembrokeshire, then to Lampeter in the next county on the following day. You have blazed the trail here at Trefechan, thousands will follow in your footsteps. You have proved yourselves to be worthy daughters of Rebecca. God bless you all.'

His little speech was greeted by a roar of applause from the happy rioters and before it died away, he shook hands with Morgan Nicholas and rode away into the blackness of the night in the direction of Carmarthen. Before the folk at Glan Towy were astir, Edgar had returned home, unsaddled his horse and was sound asleep.

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The work of demolition had started, and night after night fresh outbreaks continued to take place in various parts of West Wales. True to his expectations, Edgar followed the systematic attacks which he had planned, as they were reported at length each week in the *Welshman* and the *Carmarthen Journal*. On the day when the papers reached Llandovery by coach, Edgar Morgan was always waiting for his copies, and he would ride slowly home to Cilcwm reading the colourful reports. Week after week, the headlines told the same story, 'Rebecca strikes again, this time at Tavernspite, and on the following night she was at Lampeter, forty miles away.' Then followed the full account of the preparation and burning, which in the early part of the riots always followed the identical pattern which he had laid down.

Then one day in May as he was riding back to Cilcwm reading the latest rioting news, he sensed a hitch in the planned development of the movement. After the destruction of the Water Street gate at Carmarthen, people had passed through without paying; they had been recognised, prosecuted and fined, but refused to pay the fines. Then the hated special constables were sent to distrain on the property of the accused. But Rebecca had already been informed and her 'daughters' were posted. When the special constables reached the little village outside the town they found their road blocked by an angry mob with blackened faces and armed with scythes in the use of which they were very skilled. The constables wisely halted and returned to Carmarthen, discretion was always the better part of valour when faced with Rebecca's wrath.

A stronger force was then sent to the village under cover of darkness, but the organisation of Rebecca was not to be caught napping. A guard had been posted, and a warning

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blast on the horn brought the Daughters of Rebecca on the scene, the Carmarthen force was surrounded and many were badly mauled, and they were lucky to return home without loss of life.

Edgar had reined in his horse to read the news with greater concentration. Two columns of small print had been given to the affair, and he whistled quietly to himself as he pocketed the paper, shook the reins and moved on until he arrived at the Dolauhirion toll-gate. The keeper came out of his little thatched cottage to open the gate for him.

'What's wrong, Mr Morgan?' he shouted, 'had bad news?'

'Why?' retorted Edgar. 'What d'you mean?'

'You look as though the end of the world was comin', sir, nothin' serious I hope?'

'No, not really,' replied Edgar. 'Only these Rebecca boys are going a bit too far, I think; there's going to be trouble down at Carmarthen with 'em, you mark my words.'

At the mention of Rebecca's name, the toll-keeper's face changed completely.

'Don't say they're coming up 'ere,' he shouted.

'No, not yet,' Edgar replied, 'but they've been busy at Carmarthen, it's only twenty-five miles away so you can expect them any night now; you'll hear them coming, so all you can do is to lock your door and don't give them any cheek, then you should be safe.'

He opened the gate and the old soldier passed through on his way up the valley; he had already paid on his journey into Llandovery earlier in the day.

The fresh turn of events made him very thoughtful on the homeward road. He now foresaw the arrival of the military, and if big detachments of cavalry were posted at all the trouble spots anything could happen, he even gave a thought

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to the possibility of an outbreak of a minor civil war with loss of life.

On the next day he decided to ride to Carmarthen to investigate on his own. At the Halfway Inn near Nantgaredig he dismounted for a drink, and on the front door he saw a notice requesting that everyone in the district should attend a mass demonstration to be held at Carmarthen on the following Monday for the purpose of passing a resolution against the poor law and to pull down the workhouse, as many as possible should be mounted, and disguises were forbidden.

Edgar received a severe jolt to his pride, for the movement which he thought had been started by him, had now acquired new leaders in his absence and taken a new turn, grievances in many other fields of which the toll-gates were only a part, were being brought into the open.

It was typical of the Rebecca movement which was such a widespread organisation over such a big and thinly populated area, that many leaders great and small should materialise, and for a short while each would fancy himself to be Rebecca.

Edgar rode on to Carmarthen lost in a daze of wondering at the turn of fortune and the way in which the hydra-headed movement had caught fire and leapt away and now raged beyond the control of anyone. Inside the old county town the same words were on the lips of everyone: 'Are you coming on Monday?'

On the following Monday he rode again to Carmarthen and stabled his horse at an early hour to await the arrival of the demonstrators. From conversations held with the townsfolk he gathered that the mass demonstration was to take place about midday when the farmers of the surrounding



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hills were due to arrive. Thousands of townfolk already thronged the streets, and shopkeepers were nailing shutters over their windows in anticipation of trouble.

Shortly after midday the news spread that the marchers from the north had met the contingents from the west near the monument to General Picton. Then they all moved in an orderly fashion down to the old bridge over the Towy and up Castle Hill, round St Peter's Church and then entered the main street, and moving through Nott's Square arrived before the Guild Hall. The orderliness which had characterised the early stages of the march began to disappear, and instead of the peaceful presentation of the petition to the magistrates, the leaders of the procession were guided by a crowd of newcomers who led the marchers to the workhouse, where they yelled for the keys to release the half-starved paupers. When the mob gained entry they set about looting amidst scenes of wild confusion.

Edgar Morgan was a sadly disappointed man as he squeezed through the press of excited people towards the ransacking of the workhouse. He realised that such behaviour could bring nothing but discredit on the whole affair which had gone completely out of hand.

Suddenly he heard a shout, 'The soldiers are here,' and he turned to watch the crowds melt apart to allow a party of mounted dragoons to gallop up the workhouse hill. The horses had obviously been ridden hard for a considerable distance. The crowded courtyard of the workhouse was a scene of mad confusion as the dragoons swept in to take charge of the situation, and the Carmarthen riots ended with every man seeking his own escape and the demonstration coming to an inglorious end.

Sixty prisoners were taken inside the workhouse of which

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only six finally received punishment, the leader was sentenced to a year's hard labour, and the other five to eight months each.

The affair at Carmarthen attracted great attention from the press, and Rebecca came in for nation-wide publicity. The London *Times* (at that date the champion of the under-dog), sent a young investigator to South Wales to report on the situation, T. C. Foster, who succeeded so well that he was subsequently sent to other disturbances in Ireland and Scotland. He spent six months in the Carmarthenshire area sending detailed reports to his paper but mentioning no names. He was so well known to Rebecca and her daughters that he was admitted to secret meetings with his interpreter. His report in *The Times* of the big meeting of July 20th in the cemetery of the Baptist chapel at Cwm Ifor Manordeilo, between Llandilo and Llandovery, shed much light on Rebecca's deliberations. He penetrated to the heart of the movement and succeeded where the military commanders failed so hopelessly.

Speculation as to the identity of Rebecca became rife. A solicitor, Lloyd Hall, was an active worker behind the scenes. He was under suspicion at the Home Office and a detailed dossier on his background was prepared.

The mission of unmasking the elusive Rebecca was entrusted to Colonel James Frederick Love, a soldier of great experience who had fought under Sir John Moore and Wellington in Spain, then in America and later at Waterloo. He had been at Merthyr Riots in 1831, in Canada in 1838, and the Chartist march on Newport in 1839. Then he was put in command of the troops in West Wales. In addition to the Dragoons he had the Pembroke Dock Marines, the Castle Martin Cavalry, a newly-established police force and

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detachments from the South of England under his command. Then two field-pieces arrived at Carmarthen, and Love was ready for Rebecca. The military might thus arraigned against the rioters was now very considerable. But the sporadic raiding continued night after night in different parts of the county and Colonel Love's exasperation knew no bounds.

The mysterious doings of Rebecca and her daughters belong to the realm of history. The uncanny skill with which the raiders continued to steer clear of the military was due to careful planning behind the fanatical hatred of the toll-gates that marked this breakdown in the social structure of rural Wales.

The early riots were accompanied by considerable joking and good-humoured pranks, but as the madness spread, a sinister devotion to the cause overcame all classes, and public opinion hardened. Tempting offers of reward were made by the Government to induce informers to reveal the identity of riot leaders, but without effect. Magistrates who took action against any of Rebecca's children, had their property set on fire. Rioters were summoned to take part in raids by word of mouth, and failure to report for duty had serious consequences, fear of Rebecca's revenge haunted everyone. Lonely farmers were given the awful choice of taking up arms with the rioters or paying the consequences.

The movement gradually took on a sinister aspect, the widespread use of firearms had not been foreseen by the early planners, as saws and axes were the only tools needed. Threatening letters became the weapons of people who had a grudge against a personal enemy, to receive a letter signed by Rebecca was a terrifying thing. The High Sheriff of Carmarthenshire received one in which he was accused of

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oppressing his tenants; he was warned to retract or be visited by Rebecca. A spate of threatening letters were used with theft, arson and murders.

Notices were erected near some gates informing people who paid toll that they would have their property burnt. If they used the gates without paying, they were fined by the magistrates, but this was preferable to receiving a visit from Rebecca. The course then open to them was to refuse to pay and inform Rebecca, who would deal with the special constables who were sent to distrain on the offenders' property. These would be met by a crowd of Rebeccaites with blackened faces and armed with scythes.

But behind the nocturnal work of destruction, a sense of justice was maintained. Gates which Rebecca considered to be fair were left untouched, and only the many recently erected gates were wrecked. Sundays were always regarded as sacrosanct throughout the campaign.

Attacks spread north to Llandilo and Llangadock near Llandovery, then into Breconshire and Radnorshire. Gates which had been attacked and re-erected, were visited and smashed again. Rioters were caught and tried before the magistrates, the verdicts were left for the decision of juries, but Rebeccaites were so numerous that they were well represented even on juries, few verdicts were reached and cases were dismissed again and again.

Rewards for information leading to the capture of the leaders were increased by the Government, and magistrates were authorised to offer as much as £500. This was a great sum to a poor farmer and a tempting bribe to anyone who was prepared to betray a fellow conspirator, but the risk of incurring Rebecca's wrath was too great a deterrent even for such a vast sum, and no informers came forward.

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Other public grievances came in for attention, salmon weirs, the tithes, church rates, high rents, ownership of double farms, even illegitimacy and cruelty to wives were subjected to Rebecca's attentions.

Centuries-old salmon catching weirs were declared offensive by people who lived higher up the rivers. Letters were sent to Rebecca claiming that certain weirs prevented fish from swimming upstream to spawn, such complaints were acted upon, and the weirs were destroyed and the path left open for the salmon in the same way as the roads were opened up for the drovers.

The Vicar of Eglwysrw Church grazed his sheep in the churchyard, people took offence at the idea of the animals eating grass which had grown from putrefying corpses, the Vicar was charged with promoting cannibalism and the sheep were turned out.

The unfortunate Colonel Love and his tired men patrolled the hills at night, but all in vain, and one grievance after another was swept away.

The Government finally recognised the need for a large-scale enquiry, but did not act fast enough for the impatient Rebecca, and night after night over a wide area from Swansea to Cardigan Bay, and from Pembroke to Rhayadr, the toll-gate fires burned at night. Guards were placed to protect them, but they fled at Rebecca's noisy approach. At long last the Turnpike Trusts began to give in, and gates were gradually removed officially.

Then the madness of Rebeccaism started to die away and nocturnal activities were replaced by mass meetings held in daylight to discuss grievances and petition the Government to act.

History has finally acquitted the leaders and declared that

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Rebecca's cause was just. The only remedy at the time was by taking action in the name of liberty, the conspiracy was conducted with great skill and determination and reflected only credit on the one who first conceived the plan.

As soon as a Government inquiry into the Turnpike system of Wales was started, the cult of Rebeccaism died away. In 1845 came the General Enclosure Act, followed by the Repeal of the Corn Laws and the New Poor Law, and the gradual return of agricultural prosperity when an increasing market for agricultural products was found in the growing industrial districts. Through migration to industry, the rural population dwindled, and prosperity returned. The secret heroes of the Rebecca movement were woven into legends for retelling on more peaceful winter evenings in later years. With the inexorable advance of the railways, the turnpike trusts received their final *coup de grace* and shortly after the passing of the toll-gates, railway transport facilities also brought the great Welsh cattle droving epoch to an end.

On a day in 1870 the first train steamed into Llandovery station before the wondering eyes of the multitude who had gathered to watch the event. In the crowd of people stood five tall grey-bearded men; Edgar Morgan turned to his brother to remind him of the bet made long ago on the road to Smithfield in 1838, and claimed his £5.

Above the railway and the watching crowd, the earth track of the drovers' road, cut by the millions of cattle which had climbed the hill, was already turning green with untrodden grass.

Ever since that date, on each succeeding spring, the fern has tried to hide the drovers' road, but through the centuries

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of fertilising action of the cattle, the sweetness of the grass has stayed, and the constant grazing of the flocks of mountain sheep has kept it clear of fern. The only memorial to the drovers of Wales is this wide green corridor that lies across the rolling expanse of the Eppynt moors today.



